DESIRE AND DIFFERENCE:

LOOKING FOR ABSENCE IN THE WORKS OF CHARLOTTE BRONTË AND GEORGE ELIOT

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my family first and foremost for their love and continuous support while I spent time trying to become a better me so that I could be better for them. Dan, Ashleigh and Benjamin, you are my life, my loves, and my inspiration. In addition, it is dedicated to my father, Norman E. Trost. Thank you for instilling in me the value of a good education, and for teaching me to never give up.

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The nineteenth-century produced a culture rich in art, literature, and new beginnings, bringing forth new ideas and new ways of thinking. Women rose to the challenge and began to ask for rights of their own along with civil rights for other races. Rights that women take for granted today such as property rights, custody rights, and the right to control our bodies, were hard to find in Victorian England. In fact women were seen by the majority of society as property themselves, belonging completely to fathers or husbands, without a public voice, and in many cases without recourse. Women were expected to think and act in a certain way that held severe consequences if the status quo was not adhered to; few choices were available to them outside of marriage, namely teaching or governing small children.

History tells us today of this struggle for equality, and it tells us something else as well: that there were women who found a way to give voice to things which they were not supposed to say; that there were women who found a way to fight back that would allow women of the future to have more opportunities. A study of literature and the written word tells us of this struggle in ways that historical documents never can. For it is through novels and journals and letters that women bare their souls, finding a way to say what they really felt, not what they were supposed to feel. What they really thought about a society that punished difference, about a political system that was based more on assumptions and stereotypes than actualities.

During Queen Victoria's reign, a model of the "ideal" woman came to be

recognized as that of one who was morally upright, blameless, and pure. The cornerstone of Victorian life was the family, and the home was to be a shelter both from the anxieties of modern life and for the teaching of moral and spiritual values to the children. The wife was to be submissive, vowing to love, honor, and obey her husband under any circumstances; she was, in effect, his property. Sex – heaven forbid – was never mentioned around the children in order to protect them from future immoralities. Nancy Armstrong argues that "the domestic woman executes her role in the household by regulating her own desire" (81), which I interpret to mean not acting on it at all. There were women Victorian authors who give us an other way to look at the "ideal" woman of the nineteenth-century; a way that did not include the self-regulation of desire embraced by the rest of society. These women invented female characters who would embrace desire, refusing to regulate their own feelings – original, certainly – talented and inspired as well. Talent and inspiration which enabled a woman to defy convention, and authority, and write a novel about women as "other" and not "ideal".

Historically, Victorian England is associated with the time period from 1837-1901 during which Queen Victoria reigned. This was a queen who touted morality and prudery; and in order to be considered proper English ladies fit for marriage, a woman had to be moral and upright. Culturally, her appearance, demeanor, and behavior spoke volumes to Victorian society about the person

inside.[1] Chastity and a woman's virginity were necessary for marriage, and marriage is what every woman strived to achieve. The woman novelist who neglected to adhere to these cultural expectations faced many consequences: she could be shunned or made fun of by friends and family, good work could be ignored and she could go unpublished. By the time Charlotte Brontë began writing, it was firmly established that novels were supposed to adhere to an agenda that ensured a happy domestic life (Armstrong 38). Included within this agenda was a repression of sexuality which included any subject area delving into the topic of women's sexuality and/or desire.

The greatest insult to Victorian women came as a result of this sexual repression. The "angel in the house" (the term was coined by Coventry Patmore's poem of the same name when published in 1856) had to be preserved under any circumstances. Physicians were trained to curb any sexual thoughts or actions in young girls and young women, even married women. The submissive wife was the center of Victorian life (i.e. family) whose home was a model of moral and spiritual values sheltering those within from modern life's immoralities. These women were taught to regard sexual passion as lust, a sin that it would be a shame for a pure woman to feel. Sex was not mentioned in

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1 Throughout my research, this information has become common knowledge for me. However, there are several sources in particular which I have continually relied on: *Madwoman in the Attic*, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar; *Suffer and Be Still*, Martha Vicinus; *The Virgin Body as Victorian Text*, Lloyd Davis, and *The Making of Victorian Sexuality*, Michael Mason.

order to protect the children from temptation, and was seen by the wife as a "duty" according to those in the medical profession. The now famous treatise written in 1894 by Dr. William Acton in *The Functions and Disorders of the Reproductive Organs* and considered to be the "official" view of sexuality held by "official" Victorian society stated that the "wife will not require excitement as the majority of women. . .are not very much troubled with sexual feeling of any kind" (208). He goes on to say: "I am ready to maintain that there are many females who never feel any sexual excitement whatever. . .Many of the best mothers, wives, and managers of households, know little of or are careless about sexual indulgences. Love of home, love of children, and of domestic duties are the only passions they feel. . .As a general rule, a modest woman seldom desires any sexual gratification for herself" (210). It becomes easy to see why Victorian women novelists could not say explicitly what they wanted to say about wives, spinsters, and young girls; why they could not contradict the beliefs of Dr. Acton and others. To do so would challenge a patriarchal society in which women had nothing to empower them.

Since they couldn't say explicitly what they wanted to say, which was that women *did* have desires, and they *did* experience passion, and that they did *not* want to have to repress their sexuality, novelists such as Charlotte Brontë and George Eliot found other ways to express what they, as women, felt and thought. They used metaphors and settings and plot; they utilized gaps in the narrative, they searched for allegory and mythological references which would give the

reader a secret knowledge.

Feminist critics such as Nancy Armstrong, Judith Mitchell, Sandra Gilbert, Susan Gubar, and Elaine Showalter have come to develop theories over the last twenty years or so that explore the strict adherence to codes of repression and avoidance of desire exhibited by Victorian women novelists. Their work dares to be different in the way they look at women's bodies, gender roles, and the patriarchy. These pioneers in feminist criticism allow us to view difference as good, and gives us other ways of finding what the nineteenth-century woman wanted us to know regarding her desires as well as her sexuality. Their ideas, along with the theory of desire presented by Jacques Lacan, form the basis of my research. My interpretation, and my criticism will prove that despite a culture that denied women rights in marriage, a voice in public, and the exploration of desire and sexuality in private, some women authors found a way to give voice to the unspeakable.

I know that these women had something else to say besides what we could see on the written page. How do I know this? Especially when I am not trying to read between the lines and suggest what the authors *seem* to be saying. I know they had something else to say because of the *way* in which they write, the way that I *feel* when I am reading, knowing what they want me to know. I am also arguing that there were certain topics that a respectable Victorian woman writer, especially one who wanted to be published, could not/would not write about; that in addition to subjects that were taboo, women had more

hurdles to climb than did men who were in the same profession. And finally that women like Charlotte Brontë and George Eliot knew that they would have to find another way to write about taboo subjects like desire besides stating the obvious. I base my conclusions on my own reading of their novels, and the fact that while I was reading there were certain images, feelings, and impressions that were evoked which I believe were felt by the nineteenth-century woman reader as well. These impressions were and are sexual in nature, relating to a woman's sexuality and her desires. I believe that we are meant to experience these feelings as the result of the author's intentional design.

Before we can look at the novels themselves, we need to look at desire. What is desire? It is at once shared with an entire culture, yet intimate and personal; it is individually unique yet confined within a definition that can apply to any man, woman, or child who experiences it. Desire is a state of mind as well as a state of body and as such eludes any sort of final definition that could give us a clear meaning. At the unconscious level, desire's objects are no more than a succession of substitutes for an imagined presence, a half-remembered pleasure that becomes lost in the real, a completeness which is unattainable (Foster 3). It is this half-remembered pleasure that I search for, consciously looking for what I know to be there because authors like Charlotte Brontë and George Eliot found a way to write about *their* desires in a world that discouraged them from thinking, let alone acting.

Jacques Lacan spent years studying Freud's theories of psychoanalysis,

dream interpretation and the unconscious. His basic claims take into account Freud's research as well as Ferdinand de Saussure's descriptions of language and symbols, and along the way he added his own theories of desire.[2] I use his theory and definition of desire because I agree with his assessment that desire is something that can never be fulfilled. Lacan's theory starts with the ideal of the Real; this is the union with the mother's body (when we are infants), which is a state of nature, and which he says must be broken up in order to build culture. Once you move out of the Real, you can never get back, but you always want to. This is the first sense of a loss, or as Lacan says, a lack which is irretrievable. The Real is the place to which we always try to return, the impossible, something that can be neither understood nor ignored and therefore is never a satisfaction (Foster 12). To that end, Lacan believes that we desire because we cannot bear the "emptiness defined by the limits of the symbolic world" (17), thus desire is the fantasy of loss.

Feminists who have a problem with Freud's gender-biased theories tend to like Lacan more for even though Lacan was a student of Freud's, he offers a critique of psychoanalysis which is based firmly in language, *not* biology. In other words, Lacan's analysis counts on linguistics to explain human sexuality and the unconscious instead of gender. Freud's failure was that he imagined

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While Lacan's research is part of the basis of my thesis, delving into the intricacies of his work, which encompasses several volumes, is impossible to do here. I have summed up and inserted the applicable information necessary to help the reader understand my use of his findings.

female desire within masculine parameters because he viewed her sex as an absence (Lacan 113). While we credit Freud with the finding of the unconscious as governed by its own laws to which direct access is impossible, Lacan develops this idea of the unconscious and includes sexuality as a construction, saying that it is within the production of the unconscious and sexuality that the human animal is born into language, and it is within the terms of language that humans are created. "Language does not arise from within the individual, it is always out there in the world outside, lying in wait for the infant. Language always 'belongs' to another person" (5).

Lacan's subject is "not an entity with an identity, but a being created in the fissure of a radical split" (5). This split occurs because the "subject" forms an image of itself by identifying with another subject's perception of it. It is not a self which is divided, it is a self which is "necessarily created" within a split — a being that can only think of itself when it is "mirrored" from the position of another's desire (5). Within this division where language falls, sexuality also lies, and for my purposes this division is important because of the psychoanalytic notion of repressed sexualities which are forbidden. It is the forbidden that makes up the repressed attitudes of women because women's bodies, their movements, and gestures are constantly subjected to scrutiny; so much so that we become self-disciplinary and we learn that female sexuality must be repressed, thus alienating us from our own sexuality.

Alienating women from their sexuality is the basis of Victorian repression,

and it was so thoroughly entrenched within nineteenth-century culture that it was hard to find "desire" in literature, especially written by women, so we must look for what is not there. It is this alienation that subjects women to repression, and restricts them from acting on their desires in public because "nice" girls don't stare boldly or show off their bodies, they look down at the ground and speak only when spoken to. Meanwhile, "loose" women violate these norms, move in a free and easy way, and look at whatever, whomever they please. In order to act, then, these nineteenth-century female authors that I am looking at had to find a way to make it appear as though they were alienated from their sexuality while at the same time letting other women know that it was okay to experience desire and pleasure. No easy task, so they learned to disguise their writing as well as their voices.

One such way to disguise their voices was with the use of male pseudonyms, which is something Marian Evans chose to do as George Eliot. Disguised as a man, a woman could write about things that were important to her without worrying if she would be stepping outside of her assigned boundaries. She also would not have to worry about the stigmas that might be attached to her as a female; in Eliot's case it was the fact that she was living with a man who was still "technically" married. George Henry Lewes, her partner, helped Marian Evans keep her disguise, for he knew that if "Adam Bede were known to be by Marian Evans, the strong-minded woman who was living with him, every newspaper critic would have written against it" (Haight 268). Another way to

disguise her voice was to create a story that people would want to read, using familiar elements of fairy tales and romance, orphaned children and just enough assurance of the status quo that would enable the story to get published.

Josephine Donovan, in *Feminist Literary Criticism*, lists the attributes that literature commonly ascribes to women: formlessness, passivity, instability (hysteria), confinement (narrowness, practicality), piety, materialism, spirituality, irrationality, compliancy, incorrigibility (shrew, witch) (62). She goes on to list two patterns of plot: 1) a presence of absence—hollows, centers, caverns within the work — places where activity that one might expect is missing. Menstruation, childbirth, or women's rage, for example, are events that are frequently absent from, or subtly coded in literature; 2) the sexualizing of the principle of activity, both exterior and interior, physical and mental. Literature has tended to masculinize most activity, particularly worldly activity, even as it has recorded it. The women in literature who try to act, or to exercise will, are by the books' conclusions either prisoners or paralytics, literally or physically (63). It is important to know about these two ideological patterns of plot, because Charlotte Brontë and George Eliot wrote outside of the expected patterns.

In rejecting what she considered to be austere and docile writing of the women novelists such as Jane Austen who had gone before her, Charlotte Brontë chose the literature of the heart, the body, and sexuality, deciding instead to write about "what throbs fast and full, though hidden, what the blood rushes through, what is the unseen seat of life" (Leavis 10-11). Her novels realistically

women at a time when it was considered to be something that did not exist.

Brontë's novels intentionally create a set of sexual references that allows the reader to uncover the special language of desire. In *Jane Eyre* it is the master-governess bond which creates an implicit relationship of power and sexuality even before the action begins; in *Villette* it is the teacher-student bond which again sets up a power struggle that implies a possible sexual relationship. A governess virtually alone on an estate with its powerful master, an eligible bachelor (so we think) is the stuff that fairly tales are made of, so we have to assume from the beginning that the possibility of a relationship between Jane Eyre and Rochester is real. Again, the teacher-student bond between M. Paul and Lucy Snowe is a series of téte-â-téte's in which the sexual tension between the two becomes more and more obvious to the reader. Both novels are structured around sexually segregated schools with Jane in Lowood, and Lucy in Madame Beck's Pensionnat de Demoiselles, which also have sexual implications. We don't have pages and pages that detail the lovemaking of these characters, and the implications of possibility are part of what makes Brontë's novels so exquisite. She dances around the action, implying it in language, through the use of symbols and as allegory which tell us in no uncertain terms that sexual desire will be fulfilled.

In *Archetypal Patterns in Women's Fiction*, Annis Pratt gives us other tools to use when searching Brontë's novels for examples of fulfillment and growth, particularly what Pratt calls the "green-world archetype" (16). Drawing

from Simone de Beauvoir's writings on adolescent girls, Pratt concludes that an adolescent girl about to be "conquered by 'human' society" turns to something "inhuman" — nature, and by taking possession of nature, "she possesses *herself*" (17). We can see this progression in both *Jane Eyre* and *Villette*. When Brontë uses metaphors of moors and gardens, she is revealing both Jane's and Lucy's dreams and experiences to us more intimately — nature is a memory to which both return for renewal. Women find solace, companionship, and independence in nature. Nature, then, becomes an ally of the woman hero, keeping her in touch with her selfhood and enabling her to make her way through the alienations of male society. Again, we can see this in both novels where particularly good things happen in gardens and moors.

It is my belief that Charlotte Brontë's main intention when writing both *Jane Eyre* and *Villette* was to explore thoroughly the awakening of a young woman's sexuality. Both Jane Eyre and Lucy Snowe search for sexual fulfillment in a quest worthy of any hero. The path to fulfillment is forged with conflicts and other forces diametrically opposed to the fulfillment of desire that must be confronted by both heroines. Elaine Showalter's description of Brontë's narrative expression in *Jane Eyre* can be used to sum up both novels:

> Psychological development and the dramas of the inner life are repressed in dreams, hallucinations, visions, surrealistic paintings, and masquerades; the sexual experiences of the female body are expressed spatially through elaborate and rhythmically recurring images of rooms and houses. (113)

Both heroines experience telling dreams, hallucinations and visions; the sexual

experiences of both women are described symbolically. Their dreams and visions are telling because they describe the psychological dramas of the inner life that give us the opportunity to interpret how they feel about sexuality and desire, both of which are not stated explicitly but instead described symbolically.

It comes as no surprise, then, that *Jane Eyre* has been called "arguably the most erotic English novel written in the nineteenth-century" (Mitchell 44); and it is here that Brontë comes "closest to creating a female subject of desire" (29). She does this in a number of ways — one of which is that her heroines are physically plain, "a quality that removes them at once from the usual objectification of beautiful women" (30). Her heroines also "own the look of desire," for it is the men who are described in detail and it is the "female gaze which is the gaze of desire and ultimately of judgement"(30). Brontë's expectation is that Jane not be seen as an object of desire, by Rochester or the reader, which will allow her to say what she herself desires, not what society says she should.

There is something exciting in reading about a woman who takes charge of herself, her future, and her emotions. A woman could not/would not ordinarily be so defiant, which is one more remarkable thing that Brontë does with this novel — she creates a heroine who is outside of the specialized feminine ideal and enables us to see women in other ways. Not only is Jane defiant, but she is also very stoic, holding her emotions in check so that when she does let go of them, it is both a release for her and the reader. An additional quality of

Brontë's desiring creation is the way that she gives Jane the voice of a woman who most of the time is seemingly empowered by her speech alone. She has no money, status, or good looks to help her make her way, and must rely on her own instincts and personal sense of right and wrong. As a child living with her deceased uncle's wife and cousins, Jane suffers many injustices. It doesn't take the reader long to figure out that she is treated so unfairly because her aunt is jealous of the affection that was shown to her before her uncle's untimely death. Typical of a fairy tale beginning comparable to Cinderella, Jane is unloved and unwanted in her aunt's house; her cousins treat her unfairly and it is her older cousin John Reed who causes her to suffer the most.

From the very first page of *Jane Eyre* we know that Jane is not like the other children, that she is an outcast used to punishment she does not deserve. She stands in the doorway as an outcast, as her cousins surround their mother lovingly. Jane gets no loving words from her aunt, receiving instead a lecture about her unacceptable behavior. When Jane asks what she has done, she is told to "acquire a more sociable and childlike disposition, a more attractive and sprightly manner, —something lighter, franker, more natural as it were"; as she again tries to question, her aunt says: "Jane, I don't like cavillers or questioners: besides, there is something truly forbidding in a child taking up her elders in that manner" (6). Brontë has deliberately chosen to write about a child who is outside the ideal so that the young woman she becomes may be as well.

As a child with no family or wealth of her own, Jane has no choice but to

remain at Gateshead and endure the family's rebukes. When she does stand up for herself she delights in the freedom such self-defense provides: "Ere I had finished this reply, my soul began to expand, to exult, with the strangest sense of freedom, of triumph, I ever felt. It seemed as if an invisible bond had burst, and that I had struggled out into unhoped-for liberty" (36). Most of the time however, she endures, even to the point of breakdown: "I felt physically weak and broken down: but my worse ailment was an unutterable wretchedness of mind: a wretchedness which kept drawing from me silent tears; no sooner had I wiped one salt drop from my cheek than another followed" (19). Brontë uses this struggle to show the unfairness of a Victorian woman's upbringing.

Jane's upbringing is not only unfair, but the lifeless, cold, and rainy world she inhabits is portrayed through the scenes of the book she chooses to read, and she identifies with their words:

> Of these death-white realms I formed an idea on my own: shadowy, like all the half-comprehended notions that float dim through children's brains, but strangely impressive. The words in these introductory pages connected themselves with the succeeding vignettes, and gave significance to the rock standing up alone in a sea of billow and spray; to the broken boat stranded on a desolate coast; to the cold and ghastly moon glancing through bars of cloud at a wreck just sinking. (7)

Jane senses, as a child, that she is the rock standing alone, amidst desolation where both reader and heroine are left to wonder if she will endure. Endurance is questionable as John Reed enters the scene and begins his daily torture. When Jane fights back this time, she ends up being thrown into the "red-room":

> The red-room was a spare chamber, very seldom slept in. A bed supported on massive pillars of mahogany, hung with curtains of deep red damask, stood out like a tabernacle in the centre. . .the carpet was red; the table at the foot of the bed was covered with a crimson cloth; the walls were a soft fawn colour, with a blush of pink in it;. . .Out of these deep surrounding shades rose high, and glared white, the piled-up mattresses and pillows of the bed, spread with a snowy Marseilles counterpane. Scarcely less prominent was an ample, cushioned easy-chair near the head of the bed, also white, with a footstool before it; and looking, as I thought, like a pale throne. (12)

This passage has been examined by critics in every possible area of criticism. For my purposes it is telling for several reasons: the red-room is a bedroom, in which sex acts take place; the bed is large and sits in the center of the room like a "tabernacle", or a place on which sacrifices are made (here specifically the sacrifice of a virgin); the bed is surrounded by curtains, suggesting that what goes on behind the curtain is something that should be hidden. The room itself also has sexual connotations in that it is red—the color associated with passion, and rage—both of which are associated with sexuality, and white—virginal, a "pale throne." It is rage that sent her to the red-room, an empty room that is defined by the absence of love.

The passage continues: "Mrs. Reed herself, at far intervals, visited it to review the contents of a certain secret drawer in the wardrobe, where were stored divers parchments, her jewel-casket, and a miniature of her deceased husband" (13). The secret compartments, wardrobes, drawers, and jewel chest associate the red-room with the adult female body. The fact that Jane is imprisoned here in this room with its sexual connotations and is forbidden to eat,

play, or socialize because she is being punished for being a "bad animal" (as John Reed calls her) implies that Jane must fight the virginal figure of womanhood that was portrayed in her society as the ideal in order to discover and enjoy her sexuality. She has a long road ahead of her and the red room acts as an enclosure attempting to keep Jane from self-fulfillment; yet it is also her act of defiance that allows her to escape her imprisonment at Gateshead.

We know that Jane has acted defiantly because she tells us:

> Speak I must: I had been trodden on severely, and must turn: but how? What strength had I to dart retaliation at my antagonist? I gathered my energies and launched them in this blunt sentence: "I am not deceitful: if I were, I should say I loved you; but I declare I do not love you; I declare I dislike you the worst of anyone in the world." (35-6)

Even before this outspokenness, Jane rallies against the unfairness of her life: "'Unjust!—unjust!' said my reason, forced by the agonising stimulus into precocious though transitory power; and Resolve, equally wrought up, instigated some strange expedient to achieve escape from insupportable oppression—as running away, or, if that could not be effected, never eating or drinking more, and letting myself die" (14). This agonizing beginning allows us to read *Jane Eyre* as a story about the struggles experienced by young girls as they become young women.

Young Jane is transferred from one virtual prison—Gateshead—to another—Lowood, which is a school for orphans run by Mr. Brocklehurst, a hypocrite who preaches abstinence to others while indulging himself and his

family obscenely. Jane likens him to the wolf in the children's fable, "Little Red Riding Hood": "What a face he had, now that it was almost on a level with mine! what a great nose! and what a mouth! and what large, prominent teeth!" (32), intimating that he could eat them up and should be feared. Jane also tells us that Lowood is an institution – "I was still pondering the signification of 'Institution'" (49). Here, as in *Villette*, Brontë uses an enclosure in which the girls can be kept from the dangers of the outside world, particularly from pleasurable things (in which I include a woman's sexuality). In this case the school has a garden with "a wide enclosure, surrounded with walls so high as to exclude every glimpse of prospect. . ." (48), and we know that there is "great pleasure" beyond the enclosure because Jane tells us: "I discovered, too, that a great pleasure, an enjoyment which the horizon only bounded, lay all outside the high and spike-guarded walls of our garden" (76). Ironically, it is precisely within these enclosures — in the gardens especially — that sexual knowledge takes place. It is also this garden that keeps Jane alive when everyone else succumbs to death, and we can again see Annis Pratt's argument that it is this green world to which Jane continually turns in her quest for selfhood.

As an institution, Lowood disciplines its inmates by attempting to destroy their individuality as well as their budding sexuality. The girls all wear the same unattractive uniform of brown dresses "made high and surrounded by a narrow tucker at the throat. . .which gave an air of oddity even to the prettiest" (46); have the same hair cut (no curls allowed); and all "moved simultaneously, as if

moved by a common spring" (47). The girls are starved both figuratively and literally, which Brocklehurst feels necessary in that he is teaching the girls the chastity they will need for their future endeavors as poor teachers and governesses. His plan in bringing up these girls, he says, is "not to accustom them to habits of luxury and indulgence, but to render them hardy, patient, self-denying. . .to mortify in these girls the lusts of the flesh" (65). Just as the "angel in the house" is meant to protect the children from the immoralities of the outside world, so is Lowood intended to keep its young women free from the debauchery of sexual thoughts and feelings. He is trying to create the angels and keep them in their proper place within the domestic sphere.

Helen Burns is Brontë's version of the angel in the house. She is seemingly perfect — pious, intelligent, she has no use for material possessions and cares not about the physical abuse they endure at Lowood. Brontë quickly terminates the Victorian ideal woman; Helen Burns dies in Jane's arms and her death symbolizes the death of the angel in the house that must be exterminated if Jane is to express and fulfill her desires, and her literal death in the novel gives Jane her freedom from this institution. We could also say that Helen is killed by patriarchy and that it is necessary for Helen to die in order for Jane to live; or in other words, it is necessary for the angel in the house to expire so that the woman Jane can grow. Jane is eighteen when she leaves Lowood — the age that signifies a young woman — and goes to Rochester's estate where she takes up residence there as the governess to his young ward Adele.

Jane enjoys her role as governess, yet longs for something more than what she has found so far at Thornfield. She tells the reader they may blame her for yearning:

> Anybody may blame me who likes, when I add further, that, now and then, when I took a walk by myself in the grounds; when I went down to the gates and looked through them along the road; or when, while Adele played with her nurse, and Mrs. Fairfax made jellies in the store-room, I climbed the three staircases, raised the trap-door of the attic, and having reached the leads, looked out afar over sequestered field and hill, and along dim sky-line—that then I longed for a power of vision which might overpass that limit; which might reach the busy world, towns, regions full of life I had heard of but never seen, that then I desired more of practical experience than I possessed; more of intercourse with my kind, of acquaintance with variety of character, than was here within my reach. (111)

I believe that this state of longing is the beginning of Jane's sexual awakening. She continues to tell the reader that she is restless in nature, and that she would often find relief in pacing on the roof and at these times her heart "swelled" and "expanded" with life. With her imagination she created a tale that she continued to narrate, one that "quickened with all of incident, life, fire, feeling, that I desired and had not in my actual experience" (111). Many critics, myself included, find this placement telling in that she is right above the place where Bertha Rochester is imprisoned; even though we have not yet met Bertha we find out that she is mad — in a way that is associated with sexual excess. Sex, passion, and desire are things that Jane has yet to experience.

To further this line of thinking, Brontë immediately follows this narration with Rochester's appearance in the novel, and does so within the garden in

winter, implying the "promise of fruition — of wild summer rose, of autumn nuts and blackberries — in the dried plant and seed of winter, an obvious but moving cognate with the sexual promise in the two future lovers" (Maynard 115). More importantly, upon the first meeting between Jane and Rochester, it is her gaze we see, not his:

> I could see him plainly. His figure was enveloped in a riding cloak, fur collared, and steel clasped; its details were not apparent, but I traced the general points of middle height, and considerable breadth of chest. He had a dark face, with stern features and a heavy brow; his eyes and gathered eyebrows looked ireful and thwarted just now; he was past youth, but had not reached middle age; perhaps he might be thirty-five.(115)

We hear other people say things regarding Jane's appearance, but not once is she described in physical detail, not even by Rochester. The fact that she considers herself to be plain is a tribute to Brontë's creation of a character who is not beautiful and therefore less likely to be considered an object of desire. Jane never sees herself as a surveyed female and is therefore not turned into an object.

Subjects and objects are significant to think about because all reproductions of images in culture fall into social relations which are produced, exchanged, and consumed. These images are the product of social interaction between two people which becomes problematic because images of women have traditionally been the property of men. Gazing at someone produces a social exchange which is consumed by the gazer and is therefore considered to be a masculine gaze which is as much a way of reducing women as it is of

desiring them. One could argue that the gaze is not necessarily male, but to own and activate it, given our language and cultural structure, is to be in the masculine position. Men do not simply look; their gaze carries with it the power of action and possession which is typically lacking in the female gaze. The fact that Brontë gives this power to Jane puts her in the masculine position which allows her to own and activate desire.

Since Jane is not an object, she is given the power to be the surveyor, and Brontë devotes a full two pages of text to Rochester's description through Jane's eye—she is the surveyor and surveys without guilt, apprehension, or a fear of being caught. By giving Jane the ability to survey as a man, Brontë gives her the power of the male gaze as she continues her survey:

> Mr. Rochester looked different to what I had seen him look before; not quite so stern—much less gloomy. There was a smile on his lips, and his eyes sparkled. . .still he looked preciously grim, cushioning his massive head against the swelling back of his chair, and receiving the light of the fire on his granite-hewn features, and in his great, dark eyes; for he had great, dark eyes, and very fine eyes, too—not without a certain change in their depths sometimes, which, if it was not softness, reminded you, at least, of that feeling. (133)

When he catches her, "He had been looking two minutes at the fire, and I had been looking the same length of time at him, when, turning suddenly, he caught my gaze fastened on his physiognomy" (133). She is not ashamed and when he says, "You examine me, Miss Eyre, do you think me handsome?" she answers bluntly "No, sir." They banter back and forth and as Rochester stands to contemplate the evening, Jane continues her perusal:

> [h]is shape was seen plainly as well as his face; his unusual breadth of chest, disproportionate almost to his length of limb. I am sure most people would have thought him an ugly man; yet there was so much unconscious pride in his port; so much ease in his demeanour; such a look of complete indifference to his own external appearance; so haughty a reliance on the power of other qualities, intrinsic or adventitious, to atone for the lack of mere personal attractiveness, that, in looking at him, one inevitably shared the difference, and, even in a blind, imperfect sense, put faith in the confidence. (135)

This detailed observation of a man is virtually unheard of in literature at this time. What makes this passage so wonderful, besides the fact that it allows the woman to be the surveyor rather than the surveyed, is its intrinsic message. Brontë is telling the reader that beauty does not matter—a person's demeanor and other qualities should "atone for the lack of mere personal attractiveness."

Rochester does observe Jane, but not with the physical scrutiny that Jane is allowed to use when she describes Rochester. While his study of her includes observations of her character, there are some sexual implications to his words:

> I see, you laugh rarely; but you can laugh very merrily: believe me, you are not naturally austere, any more than I am naturally vicious. The Lowood constraint still clings to you somewhat; controlling your features, muffling your voice, and restricting your limbs; and you fear in the presence of a man and a brother—or father, or master, or what you will—to smile too gaily, speak too freely, or move too quickly: but, in time, I think you will learn to be natural with me. . .and then your looks and movements will have more vivacity and variety than they dare offer now. I see at intervals the glance of a curious sort of bird through the close-set bars of a cage: a vivid, restless, resolute captive is there; were it but free, it would soar cloud-high. (141)

This ingenious passage suggests not only the promise of a relationship, but

allows Brontë to again say explicitly how women are imprisoned by society's unrealistic ideals which in effect confine them; and if set free from these ideals they could soar with limitless potential.

Jane does allow herself to soar; she allows herself to believe that Rochester cares for her, and in this observation Brontë also sets up the perfect relationship for desire in that it is unrealistic more than wrong:

> I pronounced judgment to this effect: —That a greater fool than Jane Eyre had never breathed the breath of life: that a more fantastic idiot had never surfeited herself on sweet lies, and swallowed poison as if it were nectar. "You," I said, "a favourite with Mr. Rochester? You gifted with the power of pleasing him? You of importance to him in any way? Go! Your folly sickens me. And you have derived pleasure from occasional tokens of preference—equivocal tokens, shown by a gentleman of family, and a man of the world, to a dependent and a novice. How dared you?. . .It does good to no woman to be flattered by her superior, who cannot possibly intend to marry her; and it is madness in all women to let a secret love kindle within them, which, if unreturned and unknown, must devour the life that feeds it. (162-3)

This is one of my favorite passages. What woman hasn't experienced these same feelings of impossible longing for a hopeless love? Trying to reconcile feelings that maybe should not be felt, but that cannot be helped, feeling the hopelessness of a secret love. Brontë has delved into the minds of women everywhere, in a timeless fashion, allowing the reader to see the complexity of our thoughts and desires.

Brontë is an expert at this dance of desire. Once Rochester has expressed his love for and desire to marry her, he wants her to give in to his wishes, yet Jane knows that the minute she complies he will lose interest in her.

She says:

> For a little while you will perhaps be as you are now, —a very little while; and then you will turn cool; and then you will be capricious; and then you will be stern, and I shall have much ado to please you: but when you get well used to me, you will perhaps like me again, —like me, I say, not love me. I suppose your love will effervesce in six months, or less. I have observed in books written by men, that period assigned as the farthest to which a husband's ardour extends. Yet, after all, as a friend and companion, I hope never to become quite distasteful to my dear master. (264)

The minute she does what he wants, she knows she's lost him because that's how relationships have played out through time and culture, regardless of nation, race, or era. This is the very definition of desire—kept at bay, never fulfilled, the longing can always be there at the ready. I would also add that Brontë seems to be suggesting that desire is different for men and women because there is no mention of Jane ceasing to love Rochester under any circumstances. Even when she rejects him because she finds out about Bertha, Jane never stops loving him; her desire to be his wife never wanes.

In order to write what the reader wants to read, Brontë uses a symbolic language that allows the deeper self to speak through images, sexual images which can be found in the life of inanimate objects such as trees and flowers. With their obvious sexual qualities they juxtapose all that is juicy, budding, or fruitful with what is juiceless, detached, or barren. In the end she encourages both Jane and the reader alike toward the acceptance of sexual energies despite the danger attached to such acceptance. Nowhere is the sexual image more apparent than in the Eden-like scene that takes place immediately

following Bertha's attack on Mr. Mason. Rochester calls Jane to get some fresh air with him:

> He strayed down a walk edged with box; with apple trees, pear trees, and cherry trees on one side, and a border on the other, full of all sorts of old-fashioned flowers, stocks, sweet-williams, primroses, pansies, mingled with southernwood, sweet briar, and various fragrant herbs. They were fresh now as a succession of April showers and gleams, followed by a lovely spring morning, could make them: the sun was just entering the dappled east, and his light illumined the wreathed and dewy orchard trees and shone down the quiet walks under them. (219)

This is a garden full of fragrant blooms in the middle of a season filled with potential and promise. Rochester then says "Jane, will you have a flower?" and he gathers a "half-blown rose, the first on the bush," offering it to her. The obvious implication here is one of virginity, and of a woman on the verge of blooming amidst the flowers already in bloom, anticipating her first sexual experience. This is in direct contrast to Bertha, the madwoman in the attic who has had many sexual experiences (even with men other than her husband, we are led to believe) and is past her bloom.

Just a short while later, Jane herself chooses the Eden-like orchard setting, again returning to the green-world where she finds solace. She describes again the living fullness of trees and flowers and writes:

> Sweet briar and southernwood, jasmine, pink, and rose, have long been yielding their evening sacrifice of incense: this new scent is neither of shrub nor flower; it is—I know it well—it is Mr. Rochester's cigar. I look round and listen. I see trees laden with ripening fruit. . .no coming step audible; but that perfume increases: I must flee. (252)

She is not quick enough, though, and as she quietly tries to pass he stops her

with a question. She is compelled to come out of hiding and speak with him. The fact that Jane smells a new scent, knows it is Rochester's cigar (a phallic symbol) and sees trees "laden with ripening fruit" says to me that Jane has decided to take the next step by acting on her sexual desires, with Rochester. It is within this scene that Rochester asks her to marry him and share his life, and their lovemaking begins as he takes her in his arms and kisses her repeatedly.

Jane has begun to realize her desires, not only those that involve Rochester, but personal ones as well. She has already realized that she must remain a curiosity to her lover or risk losing him early on, and along with this realization comes the desire to be on equal footing with Rochester. She knows that they must be equals in order for their relationship to work. When he proposes, she makes this clear: "I am not talking to you now through the medium of custom, conventionalities, or even of mortal flesh; —it is my spirit that addresses your spirit; just as if both had passed through the grave, and we stood at God's feet, equal, —as we are!" (257). Jane believes they are equals, but the reader and Brontë know this is not true. Brontë knows because women are never equal to men in her society, especially an orphaned governess and a wealthy man she calls "master." Her sexual fulfillment is on hold and the reader sympathizes with Jane, wanting to see the relationship culminate in the passion we know these two lovers share. Yet Jane must be truly independent first in order for her desire not to be misconstrued as something else, such as the desire to marry only because she wants to improve her station in life.

Bertha Rochester is the symbol of desire unrestrained, and we learn the truth of her identity just as Jane and Rochester are to be married. He tells Jane that the marriage was an arrangement between his father and Bertha's family and that once married he found her to have propensities of a sexual nature toward "the most gross, impure, depraved " (392) he ever saw. Her character is created out of the cultural fears regarding sexuality and functions primarily as a warning of the dangers of sex — cleverly — because Brontë uses Bertha's appearances to appease the Victorian censor who was looking for something to suggest the dangers of passion that lie in wait for Jane if she succumbs to sex, either within or outside of marriage. In this same way the censor can delight in Bertha's death —she gets what she deserves, and at the same time Charlotte Brontë can say what she really wants to say —that the patriarchal restrictions inflicted on Victorian women lead to madness, and death.

Jane will not be subject to these restrictions because she exerts her own free will and at times even loses some of her self-control, which provides an erotic release for both her and the reader. The impression we get is that female desire will find a way to express itself no matter what tries to restrain it, and as we have already seen, Jane expresses her desire through speech — she tells us often that she is "impelled" to speak by "impulse" "force" "something" and a "vehemence of emotion." She says in the very beginning, "Speak I must," because Charlotte Brontë knows that her many Victorian peers have been silenced for too long. Jane is empowered by her speech and she asserts herself

when she tells Rochester: "I care for myself. The more solitary, the more friendless, the more unsustained I am, the more I will respect myself" (322). We can then ascertain the possibility that Jane decides to leave NOT because Rochester is married, but because she must care for herself and will not be taken care of. When she leaves, it is with "veins running fire" and a heart "beating faster than [she] can count its throbs" (322), both of which suggest an erotic passion that longs to be fulfilled, no matter what the cost.

Judith Mitchell suggests that Jane's position as female object of desire means that she must yield to the male's pursuit reluctantly and only when the "stakes are high enough" (53). She says that the stakes are not high enough when Rochester is legally unable to marry her and that Jane is "forced to deny her own desire completely, paradoxically renouncing her lover in order to keep him" (53). I have to disagree with her somewhat, if only in her choice of wording, for if we say that Jane is "forced to deny her own desire," then we diminish some of the gains Jane has made towards accepting and indulging her own desire. We know that Jane has done this because she does not stay silent; she engages in witty repartee with Rochester, calling him "sir" and speaking plainly with him when she should be calling him master and assuming a submissive position of silence. Because she does not do this, their banter is erotic, suggesting a familiarity with each other that comes with intimacy, and she has also stepped out of bounds by crossing the border of passivity into an area that was considered dangerous, a danger which is equated with sexuality.

When Jane leaves, she has made a difficult choice and dares to cross yet another border, for she tells us that yes, she has thought about what it would be like to make love with Rochester. She thought about the passion they would share, about the "silken snare" that such an indulgence would be to fall asleep among the flowers and waken amongst the "luxuries of a pleasure villa" (365). A pleasure villa brings to mind the image of a brothel where women and men alike give in to their desires, and Jane confirms this image when she calls herself "Mr. Rochester's mistress" and says that she would be "delirious with his love" (365). The fact that she had these thoughts tells us that her feelings have become difficult to control, and this difficulty again heightens the intensity of the eroticism, for we know that the feelings she is trying to control are sexual.

While Jane is away she never stops loving Rochester; she dreams about him, and imagines being with him again, all the while she is gaining strength and self-confidence. So much so that when St. John asks her to marry him, she realizes that she does not want to be trapped within a traditional Victorian marriage. She tells us when she turns down his proposal:

> I. . .fancied myself in idea *his* wife. Oh! It would never do! As his curate, his comrade. . .my heart and my mind would be free. I should still have my unblighted self to turn to: my natural and unenslaved feelings with which to communicate in moments of loneliness. There would be recesses in my mind which would be only mine, to which he never came; and sentiments growing there fresh and sheltered, which his austerity could never blight. . .but as his wife—at his side always and always restrained, and always checked—forced to keep the fire of my nature continually low, to compel it to burn inwardly and never utter a cry, though the imprisoned flame consumed vital after vital—*this* would be unendurable. (414-15)

In the midst of St. John's request for an answer to his proposal, Jane hears "a voice somewhere cry—'Jane! Jane! Jane!' nothing more" (427). She then makes her choice, and a personal decision: she will not sacrifice herself, her wishes and her desires, for a marriage that would be loveless and passionless. Being with the man she loves is what matters, regardless of the circumstances; for when she leaves St. John and her cousins she does not know anything about Rochester, she just knows that "it was [her] time to assume ascendancy. [Her] powers were in play, and in force" (427).

Jane knows that she must follow her heart and so returns to Thornfield. As she reaches the end of her journey, Jane experiences a strange contradiction. She imagines her homecoming in a dream with a lover who finds his mistress asleep on a bank and wishes to glimpse her face without waking her. He anticipates her beauty as he gets closer, but instead finds that she is "stone-dead" (432). This variance suggests both anticipation of a dream about to be realized as well as a fear that the fantasy never will be realized. Brontë supports this inconsistency by first giving us a Thornfield that is dilapidated and destroyed by fire with no Rochester in sight. Her heroine fights her fears and continues on anyway and when she finds Rochester in Ferndean, it is an immediate contrast to the fallen Thornfield. With its lush growth and rich foliage, Ferndean is the perfect place for Jane to reveal her love for Rochester in all its glory. It is also Jane's final return to nature where she finally feels safe and can express freely her own thoughts. When she says "Reader, I married him," we

know that Jane is making a statement, not asking for permission, and under the circumstances we are delighted for them both.

Jane Eyre is an allegory — it is a story of symbols which are used to give meaning to an idea. Brontë knew that she would need to find another way to give voice to the topics she wanted to write about so she created an elaborate system of desire underneath the surface of the novel, yet also above. She spoke plainly, saying exactly what she felt about the injustice suffered by the women in her time. Several times in the middle of Jane's monologue, she would say things like "women feel just as men feel" and "[i]t is thoughtless to condemn [women], or laugh at them, if they seek to do more or learn more than custom has pronounced necessary for their sex" (111-12). I believe she gets away with this by beginning such statements with "[w]ho blames me? Many, no doubt; and I shall be called discontented" (111). This statement gives the reader permission to blame her for the statements that follow and the painful truths within them—and allows her to say them at all.

Jane Eyre is an acceptable heroine who exists within the realm of possibility because she does the right thing: serves her time at Lowood, studying and practicing the Christian piety that was expected of her; she dutifully assumes a position as governess and is good at what she does, teaching her young pupil well; she eludes temptation by not committing adultery, and then marries a man who needs her to minister to him. Such were the elements that made *Jane Eyre* enormously popular, yet at the same time severely criticized for

its liberties because Brontë allows the reader to see deeply into Jane's desires. She also dares to tell us about the sexual standards and practices of the "other" Europeans, which is problematic because of England's colonialism. This same colonialism in effect gave England the ammunition it needed to include women as "other" and therefore something to be conquered.[3] With Jane's story, Brontë is able to satisfy the Victorian reader who wants to see the punishment of the sexualized being (Bertha), and a relationship between Jane and Rochester that suggests healing, not sexuality. What makes *Jane Eyre* so wonderful is that Brontë is also able to satisfy the Victorian (and the 20th-century) reader who wanted to read a novel about a young woman's quest for independence, love, self-assertion and sexual fulfillment by rejecting the renunciation of self and the male power structure, seeking out instead her own female authority. She does this despite the social restraints imposed on women authors, and despite the restraints of a "commercial publishing system which would reject reflections on and of the world too far from the general consensus" (Figes 114). The existence of this system is precisely why women such as Charlotte Brontë and George Eliot found it necessary to develop other ways of writing about women's desires and sexuality.

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3 Although colonialism is important in thinking about the status of women in England, its scope is much larger than the current definition of this project. However, I felt it necessary to mention in Rochester's background because I feel that it is one more piece of evidence that proves Brontë knowingly created a plot within the plot that allowed her to write about women's desires.

Where *Jane Eyre* ends, *Villette* begins in a way, even though there are several novels written in between the two. For Lucy Snowe, like Jane Eyre, is also a heroine searching for something, and there are many similarities between the two texts as I have already pointed out. Yet in Lucy, Bronte has created a character who seems to know more from the start than Jane; Lucy is empowered by things other than her speech alone. Both orphaned in effect, Lucy's childhood is much different from Jane's, and is filled with warmth and affection. Much of the action takes place in the beginning with the entrance of Polly, Dr. John, and somewhat later, Miss Marchmont.

Just as she does in *Jane Eyre*, Brontë uses buildings and enclosures which attempt to keep Lucy Snowe and the other female characters from indulging in sexual fulfillment. Yet she contrasts these attempts in wonderful ways, such as placing the action in France, a country noted for its sexual propensities. And instead of using a Bertha Rochester here she adds Miss Marchmont and Madame Beck to contrast with Lucy. Madame Beck is a symbol of repression and abnegation for she herself has longings and desires which she keeps in check and which go unfulfilled throughout the novel. In her Pensionnat for young girls, nothing goes on that Madame is not aware of— the school is watched over like a prison in which Madame herself is the warden. This creates a type of prison which can be attributed to Foucault's definition of power and empowerment in that it defines or even creates the crime it encloses (Maynard 174). The crime around which this elaborate system has been structured is

sexual potential — we are after all talking about young girls who are in the midst of blossoming sexuality.

While this potential was trampled on by Brocklehurst in *Jane Eyre*, here it is allowed to flourish, right under the watchful eyes of Madame Beck, who is a master of surveillance and espionage, and takes very seriously her role as keeper of morality in the young girls belonging to her school. Not only do the parents who send their children to Madame expect this, but Madame prides herself on her control. However, this institution of the school which is segregated by sex can again be viewed through Foucault, as he says that this system "exhibits and initiates a discussion of the sexuality it seems at such enormous pains to cover up" (173). In other words, it is only serving to create more of a desire for the very thing which is being forbidden — sexuality. From Brontë's perspective we begin to see a defiance of the Victorian attitude towards covering up and ignoring sexuality. For not only does she create a couple who carry on right under Madame's nose, but she also creates a situation in which a woman's sexuality is conjured up unsolicited with the portrayal of a nun, Justine Marie.

The school is made up of buildings which used to be a nunnery—the perfect symbol for the repression of sexuality. We are then told the story of Justine Marie, a nun who was put to death for an indiscretion which we can only presume to be sexual, for nothing else would command the punishment of death. The fact that she is buried on the school grounds, beneath a tree in the garden

in the middle of the schoolyard, serves as a type of warning and daily reminder for the girls who live within. Her story serves as Brontë's acknowledgment of the proper way a Victorian lady was held accountable for her actions. Only, instead of stopping here, she gives us Colonel de Hamal and Ginevra Fanshawe, who carry on a secret relationship right there on the hallowed ground of the nunnery, right under the watchful eye of Madame Beck. In fact, it is de Hamal's disguise as a nun (purportedly the "ghost" of Justine Marie) which enables these two to have a relationship at all. The unfaithful nun serves as a symbolic protest against the system itself.

Unlike the young lovers, and unlike Jane Eyre, Lucy Snowe appears to be consciously suppressing her desires. I believe that this allows Brontë to explore yet another way of proving that Victorian women did have desires, even when they were so good at repressing them. Lucy has desires that other women would never even acknowledge, let alone act upon. There are many instances in which we see Lucy's suppression: "Certain accidents of the weather for instance, were almost dreaded by me, because they woke the being I was always lulling, and stirred up a craving cry I could not satisfy" (103). When gazing at the picture of "Cleopatra" in an art gallery, Lucy displaces her struggle with a sexual identity onto it. She tells us herself that during her visits to the gallery, "there was some misunderstanding and consequent struggle between Will and Power. The former faculty exacted approbation of that which it was considered orthodox to admire; the latter groaned forth its utter inability to pay

the tax" (191). Her description of the painting tells the reader in no uncertain terms that she does not approve of this large woman, Cleopatra, who is lounging around in broad daylight looking quite capable of working but choosing not to.

Jill Matus, in "Looking at Cleopatra: The Expression and Exhibition of Desire in *Villette,*" says that Lucy finds the painting problematic because "the subject of the painting represents the claim of the primitive and the lack of control that Lucy fears in herself. License to recognize or own desire, especially libidinal desire, she immediately associates with licentiousness; relaxation becomes laxity" (359). She goes on to say that Lucy's "fierce sense of secrecy and privacy about her feelings is born from the knowledge that her own desires and yearnings are unlikely to be reciprocated. Hence Lucy counsels stoicism, anticipates neglect, and keeps her desires well under control. She likens herself to Jael, driving nails into the temples of her Sisera—desire." I find Matus's argument a compelling one, and feel that it likens Lucy to Jane even more. Jane was stoical also, controlling her emotions because she felt as if her desires would be unreciprocated by Rochester; both were no strangers to sorrow, and both were forced to face "reality" in all of its disappointments.

It is in this vein that I believe Lucy has earlier accepted the role as Miss Marchmont's companion and nursemaid; she is disappointed so far in life, and accepts this life without love. Miss Marchmont herself is a lonely, belligerent old woman who lives in confinement. She says that love has brought her pain and her story suggests that a woman who allows herself to experience love can be

betrayed and destroyed by her lover. Lucy understands these feelings and believes that she is on her way to becoming a Miss Marchmont. Yet, interestingly enough, it is exactly this move that allows Lucy's desires to take shape. Miss Marchmont's final recollection on the night of her death points to a pleasure that could only be gained by someone in love.

> "I love Memory to-night," she said: "I prize her as my best friend. She is just now giving me a deep delight; she is bringing back to my heart, in warm and beautiful life, realities—not mere empty ideas—but what were once realities, and that I long have thought decayed, dissolved, mixed in with grave-mould. I possess just now the hours, the thoughts, the hopes of my youth. I renew the love of my life—its only love—almost its only affection. . .While I loved, and while I was loved, what an existence I enjoyed!. . .Through that year my heart lived with Franks' heart. . .If few women have suffered as I did in his loss, few have enjoyed what I did in his love. . .It was such a love as honoured, protected, and elevated, no less than it gladdened her to whom it was given. . .I do not know," she continued, after a pause: "I cannot—cannot see the reason; yet at this hour I can say with sincerity, what I never tried to say before—Inscrutable God, Thy will be done! And at this moment I can believe that death will restore me to Frank. I never believed it till now." (34-5)

It is just after this tale, just after Miss Marchmont's death, that Lucy exhibits the first loosening of her desire; her decision to leave England suggests an awakening of something within, as she tells us: "While I looked, my inner self moved; my spirit shook its always-fettered wings half loose; I had a sudden feeling as if I, who had never yet truly lived, were at last about to taste life. In that morning my soul grew as fast as Jonah's gourd" (43). It is in this moment that Lucy makes the decision to start a new life, and I would argue that her decision is based in part on Miss Marchmont's exaltation of a love, even if it is a

love which is experienced and then lost.

Love that is lost takes us back to Lacan's analysis of desire and his claim that "desire is a fantasy of loss" (1978:23). He makes this claim based in part on a reading of Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams* in which the unconscious experiences a "discovery," or: "What occurs, what is *produced*, in this gap [the gap between the dream and reality], is presented as the *discovery*. It is in this way that the Freudian exploration first encounters what occurs in the unconscious" (25). This discovery, or "surprise" becomes a "rediscovery and, furthermore, it is always ready to steal away again, thus establishing the dimension of loss" (25). Based on Lacan's definition, Lucy's decision to leave her homeland is the beginning of an awakening of her desires, and soon after her arrival at Madame's we begin to see Lucy's sexual awakening as well. The discovery for Lucy is that she wants to do more, and does not want to die old and alone because of a lost love. It is a surprise because she went to Miss Marchmont's certain that nothing else was in store for her life, and it becomes desire when she continues to reach out to that surprise every time she tastes life.

Lucy's sexuality begins to be revealed in subtle ways, one of which is in the form of exhibitionism. Here Brontë deviates from *Jane Eyre* as she allows Lucy to be an object to be viewed. I believe that Brontë allows this in order to show Lucy's strength of character. She does not want to be in the play put on for Madame's birthday, but M. Paul talks her into it and she plays the fop to

Ginevra Fanshawe's flirt. She does not feel comfortable in her role; however, in the midst of the play, Lucy realizes that Ginevra has singled someone out in the audience, and is directing her attention to him. This person is Dr. John, whom Lucy has begun to have feelings for, and she tells us:

> The spectacle seemed somehow suggestive. There was language in Dr. John's look; though I cannot tell what he said; it animated me; I drew out of it a history; I put my idea into the part I performed; I threw into it my wooing of Ginevra. In the 'Ours,' or sincere lover, I saw Dr. John. Did I pity him, as erst? No, I hardened my heart, rivalled and outrivalled him. I knew myself but a fop, but where he was outcast I could please. Now I know I acted as if wishful and resolute to win and conquer. Ginevra seconded me; between us we half-changed the nature of the role, gilding it from tip to toe. (134-5)

According to Borislav Knezevic, Lucy's actions are a "rendering of the Lacanian assertion that desire is always the desire of the Other. . .Lucy's desire is born out of a scopic activity in which desire is staged for her" (70). Although Knezevic claims Lacan's assertion of desire for the Other, and I present it as a lack, both are essentially justified in that both are a fantasy of loss. As I have stated before, Lacan's definition of desire includes the desire for something that one cannot have, and that can never be fulfilled. Knezevic goes on to say that Lucy

> gets inserted into the circuitry of desire as she recognizes it in Dr. John's look, even though, or rather, precisely because it is a misrecognition, for she cannot decipher the look, and she is immediately drawn into a logic of symbolic lack, a realm of a failure of representation. At the same time, it is this lack of meaning in the look qua language that enables her to insert her own fantasy in this enactment of desire. That is, because of the inaccessibility of fully knowing the look, because she ultimately cannot know or be Dr. John, she can fantasize being his double and rival: she can get 'animated' by his look, construct her own 'history' around it, her own fantasy, and

start 'wooing' Ginevra. (70)

Typically, being an observed female takes away one's power to control; however, in this case Brontë uses observation to give Lucy the power to act desirous, thus enabling her to experience desire.

Lucy is a voyeur, and not only does she watch other people, but she knows that they watch her. This knowledge is one of the first signs of Lucy's awakening sexuality. For example, Lucy knows that M. Paul visits her desk and watches her. M. Paul says: "Do you think I care for being caught? Not I. I often visit your desk." And Lucy answers, "Monsieur, I know it" (334). We also know that Lucy has a problem with expressing her sexuality because of her struggle with the painting of Cleopatra in the art gallery. Again, by allowing herself to be gazed at by M. Paul, Lucy is accepting her sexual desire, for "to know one is being watched is a sign of one's erotic value" (Masse 58); and without having to directly acknowledge it, Brontë uses observation to give Lucy the power to act desirous.

The desk scene is a subtle suggestion of dominance and submission. M. Paul touches, caresses, and rearranges items; when Lucy doesn't object, it becomes a voluntarily submissive act. The next time Lucy and M. Paul are alone together, he reveals to her that he is a connoisseur of feminine nature, and here the conversation takes on an intimate tone: "I watch you and others pretty closely, pretty constantly, nearer and oftener than you or they think. . .My book is this garden; its contents are human nature—female human nature"

(352). Although Lucy comments on this conduct not being proper, she does not walk away, and by revealing this secret about himself, M. Paul's speech suggests an undercurrent of sexuality in which his gaze is an overt sexual act.

By allowing Lucy Snowe to exhibit this knowledge of the "other," Brontë is giving her carte blanche to experience desire and find/explore her sexuality. While most fiction of the mid-to-late Victorian period delivers closure by promising its central figure an unproblematic completion of identity in the love of another person, usually in the form of marriage, Brontë does not give us such an uncomplicated ending. Her works are consistently opposed to her society's attempts to suppress the development of people's sexual natures. She sees fear of loss as the fear that drives her characters into denying their feelings entirely, perhaps as the major inhibition to full acceptance of sexual passion. To that end she proves Lacan's most basic element of desire — that it can never be fulfilled. Dennis Foster puts it another way: "For each of us there is a point at which satisfaction is impossible and not just forbidden: at first we are too young, too weak to get what we wanted; that something is always still missing. . .It is as if a piece of nature, as Freud puts it, has decreed from the start that the thing we most desire will be lost" (3).

In many aspects *Jane Eyre* and *Villette* tell the same story about a woman on a quest, yet given that, they are also very different. Lucy has a much more mature perspective on life than Jane; *Villette* is more of a real life portrayal, and not a fairy tale; Lucy has come to understand herself whereas Jane never fully

understands who she is and what she does. By the time she had written *Villette*, Brontë was committed to finding a language for the emotional experience of sexual awakening and her strategy there was to allow the virgin schoolteacher to speak out against prudery and censorship. By allowing Lucy Snowe an ending that does not place her in the requisite marriage, Brontë has disrupted the hierarchy of the empowered husband and subservient wife in the Victorian ideal and allowed Lucy to make her own choices.

In order to disrupt hierarchies, feminist critics have tried to redefine "woman." According to Helene Cixous, "man is the self, woman is his Other. Thus, woman exists in man's world on his terms. She is either the Other for man, or she is unthought" (as quoted in *Feminist Thought* 224). Cixous has thus challenged women to write themselves out of the world men have constructed for them by putting into words the unthinkable and the unthought. For she feels that feminine writing is the "very possibility of change, the space that can serve as a springboard for subversive thought, the precursory movement of a transformation of social and cultural standards" (225). I believe that George Eliot does exactly this — she gives the female characters in her novels a new construct, allowing them to serve as a "springboard" for new ways of thinking and seeing. As a result, we can see Dorothea Brooke in *Middlemarch* not as a religious martyr, but as a woman who gains knowledge and power; and by the end of *Daniel Deronda*, we see Gwendolen Harleth written out of the world men have constructed, and we may feel sorry for her, not because she ends up alone

without Deronda, but because she had such limited choices available to her. As a beautiful young woman with her whole life ahead of her all she could hope for was a job as a governess or to prostitute herself in marriage.

Along with Helene Cixous, Luce Irigaray suggests a theory of woman as other, saying that "masculine discourse has never been able to understand woman, or the feminine, as anything other than a reflection of man, or the masculine" (227). She feels that within the structures of patriarchal thought there is only the "masculine feminine" as opposed to a true "feminine feminine". For my purposes, it is useful to look at Irigary's argument in order to better understand Eliot's role as an author and her use of a male narrator. Marian Evans knew that the public would not receive her as a woman author as well as they would if she were a man. So she published under a male pseudonym, and her earlier work clearly shows a fictional male narrator; yet even her later work, written after her identity became public, shows signs of a masculine narrator as well. This masculinity becomes extremely important when studying Eliot's female characters in both *Middlemarch* and *Daniel Deronda*.

Both theorists help us understand the importance of a woman author's writing, thinking, and acting differently from men in order to find the true feminine. This is hard to imagine in patriarchal Victorian society, yet there were women who found a way. As I have already mentioned, some women took male pseudonyms to disguise their identities, which also allowed them to say things that they dare not say on their own. Using a male pseudonym also meant using

a male narrator which may seem problematic when we are trying to find female characters outside of masculine thought. However, it works for George Eliot; by the time *Daniel Deronda* was published the reading public knew that George Eliot was really Marian Evans, and from a woman author they expected a female narrator. I believe that Eliot continued to use a male narrator as one way of protecting her heroines from becoming objects of desire, thus allowing them more freedom and power in their search for identity and self-fulfillment.

Eliot uses an "omniscient" narrator, one who attempts to achieve knowledge of the other (Goodheart 561) — the "other" that Helene Cixous claims we must know in order for women to be thought of at all. This same narrator also provides an objective perspective in both novels so that the reader can see how each character sees the world from his or her point of view according to individual needs. Characters tend to be unknown to one another and to themselves as well, which allows for them to find out who they are without the preconceived notions of an oppressive patriarchy which would allow them to be seen only as someone else's possession. With this omniscient narrator, gender does not matter; what does matter is that the text causes the reader to question cultural presumptions and to produce new, even previously unknown ways of thinking. George Eliot thus makes it easy to find the voice of the woman Marian Evans by giving her female characters some form of knowledge, power, or desire, that society does not expect them to have. To see how she does this, I turn first to *Middlemarch* and Dorothea Brooke.

New possibilities are exactly what the narrator in *Middlemarch* is trying to get across to the reader from the very first lines of the introduction. Eliot begins with the history of a female saint — St. Theresa — saying:

> Who that cares to know the history of man, and how the mysterious mixture behaves under the varying experiments of time, has not dwelt, at least briefly, on the life of St. Theresa, has not smiled with some gentleness at the thought of the little girl walking forth one morning hand-in-hand with her still smaller brother, to go and seek martyrdom in the country of the Moors? Out they toddled from rugged Avila. . .with human hearts, already beating to a national idea; until domestic reality met them in the shape of uncles, and turned them back from their great resolve. (7)

Here is a young woman who decides to take the future into her own hands, ignoring the options that society held for her. That is, until reality steps in "in the shape of uncles" and tries to place her back in the domestic sphere where she belongs. Eliot cleverly tells her reader that St. Theresa is a woman they should know about; a woman who "galvanizes women's vocational and sexual sorrows, while gesturing toward an incalculable pulse: the beat that, in the heat of sorrows, liquefies a woman's strict constraints" (Stockton 193). Theresa represents an extremely small number of women in the Medieval and early Renaissance ages who were able to undermine beliefs about the weakness and spiritual inferiority of femininity by positioning themselves as speakers within the powerful patriarchal church (Weber 17).

Eliot creates Dorothea Brooke as a counterpart to St. Theresa, endowing her with some of the same characteristics, such as her puritanical dress. Both women cared about creating and establishing a legacy — for Theresa it was in

the shape of a convent, and Dorothea's wish was to create homes for the poor (17). The similarities end there, and throughout most of the novel Eliot employs strategies which magnify the loss of a speaking position within a patriarchal system such as the one Theresa had available to her:

> Many Theresas have been born who found for themselves no epic life wherein there was a constant unfolding of far-resonant action. . .With dim lights and tangled circumstances they tried to shape their thought and deed in noble agreement; but after all, to common eyes their struggles seemed mere inconsistency and formlessness. . .Their ardour alternated between a vague ideal and the common yearning of womanhood; so that the one was disapproved as extravagance, and the other condemned as a lapse. (7)

Both Theresa and Dorothea tried to shape their thoughts and deeds into noble ones, which is extremely important for Marian Evans to convey to the reader. For Evans, noble thoughts and deeds were not only difficult but discouraged; thus it was important to her to create characters who did have not only noble thoughts and deeds, but a desire for knowledge as well.

Recognizing that she is without opportunities to be useful on her own, Dorothea hopes to gain knowledge through marriage. She believes that Casaubon's *Key to All Mythologies* is a project that will serve mankind as well as allow her to "live continually in the light of a mind she could reverence" (29). Dorothea believes that her marriage to Casaubon will give her a "fuller life" consisting of "large, yet definite duties" (29) and she "trembles with joy" at the prospect. Unfortunately, she discovers early in the marriage, on her honeymoon in fact, that her husband is not the brilliant scholar she had imagined, but an

insecure man who resents her efforts to be of help to him. She recognizes early on that marriage is a prison:

> Marriage, which was to bring guidance into worthy and imperative occupation, had not yet freed her from the gentlewoman's oppressive liberty: it had not even filled her leisure with the ruminant joy of unchecked tenderness. Her blooming full-pulsed youth stood there in a moral imprisonment, which made itself one with the chill, colourless, narrowed landscape, with the shrunken furniture, the never-read books, and the ghostly stag in a pale fantastic world that seemed to be vanishing from the daylight. (189)

Not only is it a prison that leaves her more restricted than she was before; it is a "moral imprisonment" as well that denies her the learning she longs for and requires her to deny her own longings and desires, submitting only to her husband's needs and wishes. Eliot sets up this picture of a miserable young bride deliberately, not because she wants her heroine to be miserable, but because she wants the reader to see that marriage isn't everything the patriarchy leads her to believe it is. That in fact, it can be "colourless," checking a youth in full-bloom before it has a chance to blossom. She doesn't have to come out and say explicitly that marriage is bad, she just has to make the suggestion, plant a seed of doubt, and she will change lives forever.

For Dorothea, her marriage checks desires that we know she has had, for in the beginning we are told that she enjoys the sensuousness of horseback riding. Men thought her "bewitching" when they saw her on horseback, for her eyes and cheeks "glowed with mingled pleasures" (3). Riding was an "indulgence she allowed herself," for she enjoyed it in a "pagan, sensuous way"

(3) that she looked forward to renouncing. The fact that she looks forward to renouncing this pleasure enables us to consider it a desire that Dorothea knows she has. And if Dorothea knows she has desires, then Eliot can show the reader the problem with suppressing one's desires, all without saying explicitly that there is a problem with repression.

Dorothea is ignorant of her sexual charm, but the narrator is not. When Celia tries to engage Dorothea in the materialistic pleasures of wearing jewelry, Dorothea resists, saying that Celia can have everything. Dorothea does not want the "trinkets" until a particularly beautiful emerald catches her eye, causing her to remark on its beauty. Unsure of her feelings, she tries justifying her delight by "merging them in her mystic religious joy" (15). Here again she is aware that she desires the materialistic beauty of the emeralds, which is evidenced by the fact that she is trying to repress/conceal such desires. However, she is unaware of her sexual charm when her face is flushed and she exhibits pleasure, and it is this very ignorance which makes Dorothea more attractive to the narrator — her sexual innocence makes him powerful in his knowledge as a voyeur. Eliot continually portrays Dorothea as sexually unaware so that Dorothea cannot be aware of another man's desirous gaze, and she does this in order to keep her from being seen as a sexual object. Yet she also, very cleverly, is able to represent the erotic female body far more explicitly than Victorian conventions would allow. By using art, allusion, and allegory she is able to free Dorothea from an exclusive male gaze by incorporating a narrator

that critiques such a gaze and its assumptions. To explain how this works, we must look further at Dorothea and Casaubon's honeymoon in Rome.

While in Rome Dorothea experiences feelings that she has never felt before, partly due to the paintings and sculptures she has seen, and partly due to the realization that her marriage is not what she thought and hoped it would be. Patricia Johnson explains Dorothea's depression as a result of her awareness of the "narrow cell in which her marriage to Casaubon has placed her" (46). The fact that this all takes place in Rome, the city which represents Western art, can also be seen as cause for Dorothea to question the representations and positions of women in society. The narrator tells us about a girl who has been brought up as a Puritan, one whose knowledge and emotions exhibit either pleasure or pain, in other words, one who is naive regarding worldly impressions (Eliot 133). The narrator also points to "bright nymphs" forming a background for the "brilliant picnic of Anglo-foreign society," then says that Dorothea had no defence against such "deep impressions" (133). The reference to nymphs is suggestive of the many paintings which Dorothea saw, evoking a culture in which woman's role is to be playful and decorative, which contrasts directly with Dorothea's ideas of wifely duties. It is the male narrator who tells us about the paintings and their effects on Dorothea, and in this way I believe the male narrator is critiquing the exclusive male gaze of Western artistic representation and its assumptions of a woman's role in society. Thus, Eliot has freed Dorothea from this same male gaze.

Dorothea's reaction to the paintings continues this line of thinking as the narrator tells us that "all this vast wreck of ambitious ideals, sensuous and spiritual, mixed confusedly with the signs of breathing forgetfulness and degradation [which] at first jarred her as with an electric shock, and then urged themselves on her with that ache belonging to a glut of confused ideas which check the flow of emotion" (134). She is naive, sexually unaware, and confused by her feelings, so she cannot be aware of another man's desirous gaze. It is the narrator who tells us that her feelings are both sensuous and spiritual, while Dorothea tells us that the sculptures and paintings feel "low", "brutal", and "ridiculous" to her (153). I believe that this is Eliot's indictment of her culture's treatment of women — low, brutal, and ridiculous.

Dorothea is confused by her feelings about marriage so far because she thinks that a life with Casaubon will allow her to maintain her religious devotion while also giving her the chance to be "greatly effective" in the world. She quickly learns that the marriage will not fulfill either of these desires and ends up spending most of her honeymoon in tears. We know this because we are told that she is seen "sobbing bitterly, with such abandonment to this relief of an oppressed heart as a woman habitually controlled by pride on her own account and thoughtfulness for others will sometimes allow herself when she feels herself securely alone" (187). We are looking at a woman — who can be any woman still today — who presents one face to the world and another when she believes herself to be "securely" alone, sure that she won't be seen by anyone,

or need to keep up the necessary facade. Yet this shouldn't be necessary, which is I believe, precisely why Eliot tells us about it. Eliot knew that women are constantly being asked to act according to others' expectations; we are supposed to "be" whatever our husbands want us to be, and not to give in to our own wishes. It is here that Dorothea has a change of heart; instead of desiring a life of religious piety with a man old enough to be her father, she realizes that she has other desires that she wants to see fulfilled.

One of these other desires is sexual in nature, which we can prove with the narrator's insinuation: "Many souls in their young nudity are tumbled out among incongruities and left 'to find their feet' among them, while their elders go about their business" (189). And again: "Nor can I suppose that when Mrs. Casaubon is discovered in a fit of weeping six weeks after her wedding, the situation will be regarded as tragic". I believe that Dorothea's crying is a sign that the marriage was never consummated, and the monologue continues to support this: "Dorothea was crying. . .for that new real future which was replacing the imaginary one drew its material from the endless minutiae by which her view of Mr. Casaubon and her wifely relation, now that she was married to him, was gradually changing with the secret motion of a watch-hand from what it had been in her maiden dream" (189). The sensuousness of Rome is contrasted with Dorothea's devastating reaction to the non-intimate reality of their honeymoon and married life so far.

It is interesting that sympathy is expressed not only for Dorothea, but also

for Casaubon:

> I am very sorry for him. It is an uneasy lot at best, to be what we call highly taught and yet not to enjoy: to be present at this great spectacle of life and never to be liberated from a small hungry shivering self—never to have our consciousness rapturously transformed into the vividness of a thought, the ardour of a passion, the energy of an action, but always to be scholarly and uninspired, ambitious and timid, scrupulous and dim-sighted. Becoming a dean or even a bishop would make little difference, I fear, to Mr. Casaubon's uneasiness. Doubtless some ancient Greek has observed that behind the big mask and the speaking-trumpet, there must always be our poor little eyes peeping as usual and our timorous lips more or less under anxious control. (271)

Eliot seems to be saying that Casaubon should be pitied not for his failure as an academic, but for trying to be masculine — having scholarly, ambitious, and scrupulous qualities, all of which are associated with masculinity. She is also very cleverly suggesting that feeling passion and acting upon such feelings is not only preferred but necessary.

While in the Belvedere Gallery of the Vatican Museum, Dorothea is surveyed by two men, the German artist Adolf Naumann, and Will Ladislaw, Casaubon's cousin. Eliot's narrator first outlines the positions of the characters, then shows the conflict among them, laying out the torrents of power and resistance within the scene, then placing the reader outside of these currents so that the Gallery scene represents different observations instead of a monopolizing male gaze. First the two men are described as they position themselves in order to view Dorothea when Naumann says to Ladislaw, "Come here, quick! Else she will have changed her pose" (132). Second, the sculpture

in front of Dorothea is described and identified as both Ariadne and Cleopatra, a "misnomer that suggests the narrator's skepticism about Western culture's ability to name correctly and interpret the meaning even of its own portraiture of women" (Johnson 49). Third, and most importantly, Dorothea is described as she is viewed by the men, she is unconscious of their gaze and quickly moves away as soon as she is aware of their presence. Therefore, not only is Dorothea not complicit with the male gaze, but Naumann admits his inability to retain her within his gaze: "Ah! it is no use looking after her—there she goes! Let us follow her home!" (132). Even though they're going to follow her, she is not conscious of their actions and, therefore, cannot be viewed as an object of desire.

Abigail Rischin puts forth a compelling argument for Eliot's explicit use of the Ariadne/Cleopatra statue as a "catalyst for the birth of desire, as a prefiguration of the novel's central romance plot, and as a vehicle for representing female eroticism within the constraints of Victorian fiction" (1122). For my purposes, Rischin's argument confirms my belief that Eliot chose to write about women's desires in a way that allowed her reader to imagine the unspeakable. The nineteenth-century reader would have been familiar with the complex figure of Ariadne/Cleopatra, and their erotic forms made their usage a perfect example for Eliot.

By the time this gallery scene occurs, it is five weeks into Dorothea and Casaubon's honeymoon when she has been abandoned figuratively by her

husband who sequesters himself with his research and leaves Dorothea to explore Rome's passionate works of art alone. He has also abandoned her by failing to provide the intimacy that marriage promises, and it is just after Dorothea has recognized this failure of intimacy that Will appears at the Casaubon's apartment. His presence cheers her, and the reader comes to feel as though Dorothea has been rescued by Will, just like the mythical Ariadne. Eliot takes the plot of the mythical Ariadne a step further and then complicates matters through the narrator's vivid description of the scene:

> Quickness was ready at the call, and the two figures passed lightly along by the Meleager towards the hall where the reclining Ariadne, then called Cleopatra, lies in the marble voluptuousness of her beauty, the drapery folding around her with a petal-like ease and tenderness. They were just in time to see another figure standing against a pedestal near the reclining marble: a breathing blooming girl, whose form, not shamed by the Ariadne, was clad in Quakerish grey drapery; her long cloak, fastened at the neck, was thrown backward from her arms, and one beautiful ungloved hand pillowed her cheek, pushing somewhat backward the white beaver bonnet which made a sort of halo to her face around the simply braided dark-brown hair. She was not looking at the sculpture, probably not thinking of it: her large eyes were fixed dreamily on a streak of sunlight which fell across the floor. (172)

So much is going on within this passage — the narrator describes the statue, not stating explicitly that the drapery has fallen, exposing a breast, yet implying the erotic body with its "voluptuousness." He then describes Dorothea, a "breathing blooming" girl, and suggests that she is not shamed by the statue; yet then he says that she was not looking at the statue, in fact probably not even thinking of it.

Finally, Eliot emphasizes the erotic significance of the statue by drawing on its actual history of mistaken identity as a dying Cleopatra. "A heroine notorious not only for the insatiable passion she inspired in men but also for her own 'voracious sexuality,' Cleopatra is both the quintessential object of male desire and the embodiment of the desiring female subject. . .Eliot deploys various forms of linguistic indirection to speak of her characters' erotic desires and sexual relationships" (Rischin 1128). In so doing she is able to represent the erotic female body far more vividly than Victorian conventions would allow her. "The overtly erotic female body that the sculpture presents—reclining and partially uncovered—suggests sexual pleasure already experienced and yet to be enjoyed. By juxtaposing the statue with Dorothea at a crucial juncture in the narrative, Eliot displays Dorothea's erotic potential" (1128). I would add that we have to assume, since Dorothea is standing near the statue, that she has seen it, and that her dreamy far-off expression could suggest that Dorothea is imagining herself as Cleopatra, a desiring female. By referring to a work of art which calls to mind the erotic body, Eliot has allowed the reader of *Middlemarch* to contemplate women owning and acting on their own desires.

A honeymoon is traditionally a time of passionate and erotic fulfillment for the bride and groom. Its "express object," as the narrator tells us, "is to isolate two people on the ground that they are all the world to each other" (185). The reader learns that this is not the case with Dorothea and Casaubon; in fact by the end of the honeymoon, Dorothea has realized what a terrible mistake she

has made, and the end of her honeymoon is the beginning of Dorothea's awareness of her self and what she wants, even though we aren't told this until we are well into the novel (455). We know it starts here because it is after this gallery scene that Dorothea returns home and is sobbing bitterly. Will's entrance into the novel here, plus the fact that he is able to cheer Dorothea in her sorrow, suggests that Eliot will not allow this young beautiful woman to be imprisoned in a loveless marriage much longer. When the Casaubons' return home, Eliot begins to include other female characters for contrast with Dorothea such as Rosamond Vincy and Mary Garth.

Dorothea is set against Rosamond Vincy and both characters are studied for their sexual appeal. Rosamond is suspect because she is aware of her physical attractiveness and exploits it; she knows she is the object of male attention and poses self-consciously to achieve it. Dorothea, on the other hand, is unaware of her sexual charm; in fact every time her appearance is described we are told that she is unaware of the effect she has on others. In chapter one we are told "she was open, ardent, and not in the least self-admiring" (12), and in chapter ten, "the simple lines of her dark-brown hair" are "in keeping with the entire absence from her manner and expression of all search after mere effect" (86). However, both are positioned for visual admiration—Rosamond does the positioning herself, and Dorothea is posed by the narrator. The narrator is in control, and he controls how the reader views Dorothea. It is in this way that he continues to keep Dorothea outside of the masculine gaze, keeping her for

himself, not wanting to share her fulfillment with the reader which is evidenced by the dissatisfaction readers feel with the ending.

George Eliot writes about the intricacies of women, even through the eyes of a male narrator. She writes about the multi-faceted desires felt by each one of us, and nowhere is this seen more vividly than in the passage where we see the blossoming romance between Lydgate and Rosamond: "Young love-making — that gossamer web! Even the points it clings to — the things whence its subtle interlacings are swung — are scarcely perceptible: momentary touches of fingertips, meetings of rays from blue and dark orbs, unfinished phrases, lightest changes of cheek and lip, faintest tremors" (333). Few words are actually said, but so much hangs in the balance of desire — a touch that lasts only for an instant, a glance, a word, a coloring of lips or cheeks, a slight trembling, all can be imagined as real, and without saying so explicitly Eliot has given us a glimpse of love-making between these two people.

Rosamond Vincy would appear to be Eliot's portrayal of the "ideal" Victorian woman, for as Lydgate describes her, she is "grace itself; she is perfectly lovely and accomplished. That is what a woman ought to be: she ought to produce the effect of exquisite music" (93). When thinking about Dorothea, Lydgate feels that she did "not look at things from the proper feminine angle. The society of such women was about as relaxing as going from your work to teach the second form, instead of reclining in a paradise with sweet laughs for bird-notes, and blue eyes for a heaven" (94). He therefore preferred Rosamond

Vincy, who had

> excellent taste in costume, with that nymph-like figure and pure blondness which gave the largest range to choice in the flow and colour of drapery. But these things made only part of her charm. She was admitted to be the flower of Mrs. Lemon's school. . .where the teaching included all that was demanded in the accomplished female—even to the extras, such as the getting in and out of a carriage(95).

Eliot sets this character up perfectly so that we expect the perfect Victorian woman, who has been taught in the perfect school how to be the perfect lady right down to the perfect way of getting in and out of a carriage. In this way she can show explicitly how distorted this ideal image is, for it is Rosamond Vincy Lydgate who is the only character to defy her husband's authority throughout the novel. Her defiance, as the ideal woman, is Eliot's way of showing that women should defy the ideal image society has created for them.

In complete contrast to Rosamond, Eliot puts Mary Garth. She says that Mary is "all the plainer standing at an angle between the two nymphs—the one in the glass, and the one out of it, who looked at each other with eyes of heavenly blue, deep enough to hold the most exquisite meanings" (110). And again, "most men in Middlemarch, except her brothers, held that Miss Vincy was the best girl in the world, and some called her an angel. Mary Garth, on the contrary, had the aspect of an ordinary sinner: she was brown, her curly dark hair was rough and stubborn; her stature was low;. . .Plainness has its peculiar temptations and vices quite as much as beauty; it is apt either to feign amiability, or, not feigning it, to show all the repulsiveness of discontent" (110). By

comparing the "angel" Rosamond with the "sinner" Mary Garth, Eliot can again point out the incongruities in the Victorian "ideal."

Finally, Eliot indicts the "ideal" image by having both the narrator and the men in the novel survey and describe Rosamond in sexual terms: "her flower-like head on its white stem was seen in the perfection above her riding-habit" (114) — sexual because flowers are viewed as metaphors for a woman's sexuality. Lydgate follows her with his eyes while "every nerve and muscle in Rosamond was adjusted to the consciousness that she was being looked at" (115). Rosamond knows she is beautiful to look at and enjoys being looked at; in ways that we have already seen this makes her an object of desire. When Lydgate considers Rosamond, he includes her body in his admiration of her: "polished, refined, docile, lending itself to finish in all the delicacies of life, and enshrined in a body which expressed this with a force of demonstration that excluded the need for other evidence" (158). By making her an object, which is the ideal in Victorian society, Eliot can point out the flaws in this image. Women were not supposed to feel or express sexuality, yet by making them objects, society was creating the very thing they were trying to suppress — sexual beings.

Eliot does not stop with the idealized image of woman in *Middlemarch;* she also uses the narrator to speak out against the demands that the institution of marriage places on women and how this in effect silences the real person hiding behind the married woman. We are told that it is "another or rather a fuller sort of companionship" that Dorothea was "hungering" for, and that the

"perpetual effort demanded by her married life" is the reason for this hunger. For "she was always trying to be what her husband wished, and never able to repose on his delight in what she was. The thing that she liked, that she spontaneously cared to have, seemed to be always excluded from her life; for if it was only granted and not shared by her husband it might as well have been denied" (455). Marriage demanded that she deny her own wishes and be only what her husband wanted her to be.

In contrast to Dorothea's marriage, Eliot gives us Rosamond and Lydgate; it would appear to be a perfect match, but several things are amiss. Rosamond, the image of the ideal Victorian lady, ignores her husband's wishes and deliberately disobeys him on more than one occasion. She also sets out to seduce Will Ladislaw simply for the pleasure of her husband's jealousy and to feed her own ego. Rosamond feels that she deserves the best of everything and thinks that marrying a physician will give her prestige and a position in high society. Lydgate is then always trying to pay for her self-indulgence which nearly places them in the poorhouse.

To say that her readers found the ending unsatisfactory is an understatement. For me the ending is anti-climatic; after 679 pages of reading and caring about what happens to Dorothea Brooke, to simply place her and Will in a carriage letting us assume that they run off together, get married, and live poorly yet happily ever after is in complete disagreement with the statement Eliot has been trying to make throughout the novel. Her indictments against the ideal

image of women, and of marriage as an institution, are harsh. The nineteenth-century reader who waited in anticipation for the next installment was disappointed with the ending; in fact, an oft-quoted anecdote cited in an early review tells of a "thoughtful and sensitive young man, who rose from the perusal of *Middlemarch* with his eyes suffused with tears, exclaiming: 'My God! And is that all?'" (Maxwell 116). This heightened anticipation that produced desiring readers increased their final disappointment because that's what desire does. It produces an effect of increasing longing and demands to be thought of continually so that once each longing is fulfilled another is there to take its place. George Eliot created not only novels of desire, but readers who desire, knowing that their desire would never be satisfied no matter what outcomes were produced by the novel's ending. In this way she allows for difference and her reader is free to imagine her own ending, one that includes her own wishes and desires.

George Eliot's novels readily reveal to today's reader the painful consequences for women of a patriarchy that denies them any desire beyond that which is sanctioned and give us female characters who recognize this patriarchy, showing us that any attempt to overcome is always compromised by their dependency on men. Her novels teach us how patriarchy works to deprive women of the ability to act, whether it be on their desires, or in their own interests. *Daniel Deronda* is a novel that profoundly destabilizes this patriarchal hierarchy; it works to interrogate and dislodge such power by removing the male

hero's story and replacing it with the stories of the dissatisfied, trapped women who cannot be known or managed by the male or the reader, for that matter. It also portrays a powerful desire for women to escape from the men whose sole quest is to control, subjugate and conquer them. Just as she does with Dorothea Brooke, Eliot creates a female character in Gwendolen Harleth who refuses to be categorized, who is incapable of being known or subjected by anyone.

Clearly, the novel attempts to know Gwendolen, to subject her within the existing patriarchal social order; yet concealed within the text, the novel works to resist her subjection. I say clearly because *Daniel Deronda* is a novel dominated by men surveying Gwendolen: the narrator, Deronda himself, Grandcourt — and in the opening sequence alone she is subjected to a sexual appraisal by the onlookers in the casino.

Gwendolen Harleth starts out as a strong, aggressive woman who knows what she wants and is not afraid to speak her mind. In fact her views of love are actually about power. Her desire is for power, and she sees marriage as a way to have the power she wants. She gains knowledge along the way (of the ways in which women are oppressed, and their limited choices in her society) and although she says she has no desire, we know she does. She desires an occupation in which she can be her own boss; she desires to control rather than be controlled by her husband; she desires to provide for her mother and sisters; and she desires to improve her education. She feels no erotic desire, as she

says: "Besides, she objected, with a sort of physical repulsion, to being directly made love to. With all her imaginative delight in being adored, there was a certain fierceness of maidenhood in her" (64). In this way Eliot makes sure that Gwendolen is not seen as a female object of desire, nor does she have to surrender control of her body.

As I suggested earlier, even though the reading public knew her true identity, Eliot continued to use a male narrator, although this time the novel is opened with the title character watching Gwendolen who is at the roulette table, herself surveying the crowd. In the course of her survey her eyes meet Deronda's, and "instead of averting them as she would have desired to do, she was unpleasantly conscious that they were arrested – how long?" (8). Under his masculine gaze, Gwendolen would like to avert her eyes but is unable to, and what she feels is

> the darting sense that he was measuring her and looking down on her as an inferior, that he was of different quality from the human dross around her, that he felt himself in a region outside and above her, and was examining her as a specimen of a lower order which roused a tingling resentment which stretched the moment with conflict. It did not bring the blood to her cheeks, but sent it away from her lips. (8)

Jacqueline Rose has discussed how *Daniel Deronda's* narrator begins the novel "by taking up the place of the man, miming perhaps, inflating certainly, the voyeurism which constitutes the woman as spectacle" (116). Yet it is also this same beginning that determines Eliot's genius, for Deronda begins his perusal of her by wondering

> Was she beautiful or not beautiful? and what was the secret of form or expression which gave the dynamic quality to her glance? Was the good or the evil genius dominant in those beams? Probably the evil; else why was the effect that of unrest rather than of undisturbed charm? Why was the wish to look again felt as coercion and not as a longing in which the whole being consents? (7)

Deronda cannot "place" her, nor determine if he is "attracted" to her. The setting itself is also uncertain, for it is a community outside of England, in a gambling casino in a foreign country; and to top it all off, the narrator opens the novel by telling the reader that "beginnings" and origins are unknowable.

Not only is history unknowable, but the present is unclear as well, and if origins are unknowable, then certainly humans must be also; with the same questions that the narrator begins the opening chapter, he closes it as well. Questions abound as the hotel guests speculate on who Deronda and Gwendolen are. "This is a scene dominated by the surveillance of more than Deronda—the guests, the narrator, are also looking, all caught in a world of uncertain, shifting positions, a world that generates obsessive surveillance as a way to find anchors" (Sypher 516). This atmosphere in which no one can be known is created by the roulette table which also equalizes everyone standing around it. In other words, at the gaming table, race, class, and gender have no distinctions — the game of chance is available to anyone — and anyone can win or lose, disregarding the rules of a society that places everyone hierarchically. One cannot see the genius behind such dismantling of hierarchies and believe that the author was not consciously trying to make a profound statement. A

statement that says all men and women are created equal, and should be treated equally, regardless of race, class, or gender.

Throughout the novel, Gwendolen typically puts herself in a position to captivate the gaze of her audience, whether it be her mother, Rex, Deronda, Grandcourt, or the reader. She is in control as she situates herself in a room so that others may have the best view, or as she chooses a charade that will provide the best performance of her self. Gwendolen also believes that she will be able to control her husband, and never doubts this until she is forced to face the fact that she has placed herself in a marriage that subjects her to a renunciation of all of her desires. Even then, she finds a way to regain control and wishes her husband dead. In this way, neither Grandcourt nor Deronda is able to truly control Gwendolen — she is incomprehensible, unknowable, and unsubjectable.

The only thing that would appear to be missing in the text is the creation of Gwendolen as a desiring female. However, I have to agree with Juliet Mitchell who says that Eliot's novels "comprise a corpus that fairly exudes eroticism" (86). She goes on to say that the "eroticism of Eliot's novels is not (at least not directly) generated by the interplay of forces within the domination/submission hierarchy. It derives instead from the sheer force of Eliot's effort to avoid acknowledging such a dynamic. . .Eliot's avoidance of the erotic is consistent and powerful, giving rise to novels that are—paradoxically— intensely erotic" (86). In other words, we can apply Foucault here just as we did with Brontë and

say that Eliot is creating the very thing she is trying to suppress, erotic characters. Only she does so here in a way that allows Gwendolen to remain outside of the male gaze, and therefore not an object of desire.

Mitchell goes on to say that in the potentially erotic encounters between characters, Eliot's narrator alludes to religion, art, or childhood innocence, trying to deny any eroticism. What actually occurs, however, is the opposite, so that "her heroines' spirituality seems inevitably to partake of the orgasmic passion of a St. Theresa, art appears in the light of sexual innuendo and, most frequently of all, childhood innocence— the 'safest' form of affection in the Victorian ethos—is transformed into oedipal and incestuous obsessions that seem all the more erotic for their ingenious disavowals" (87). For my purposes this is important because I believe that Eliot the author had to set up a novel with a character who is outside any possibility of eroticism so that Eliot's narrator could become the object instead.

For example, Gwendolen objects fiercely to "being made love to" which she tells every man she sets her sights on. However, the narrator paints a different picture completely:

> Deronda was there, and within her sight very often; but this only added to the *stimulus* of a *pleasure* which Gwendolen had only once before *tasted*, and which seemed likely always to give a delight independent of any crosses, except such as took away the chance of riding. . .The *wish to speak to him and have him speaking to her was becoming imperious*; and there was no chance of it unless she simply asserted her will and defied everything. (307-8, italics mine)

Gwendolen is exhibiting all the signs of desire, and the narrator is telling us so

explicitly. Using words such as "stimulus", "pleasure", and "tasted" along with a phrase that suggests these feelings are overriding every other impulse and emotion; causing her to defy everything in order to get what she wants is very suggestive of an erotic encounter. In other words, even though she does not recognize it as such, Gwendolen's desires have an erotic component to them and Eliot has protected her desires with the use of a masculine narrator.

Deronda comes to be seen as a priest-like figure to Gwendolen, who confesses her "sins" at intervals throughout the novel. Yet it is always when Gwendolen is with or near Deronda that the narrator uses erotic images, such as:

> Her eyes were tearless, and had a look of smarting in their *dilated* brilliancy; there was a subdued *sob in her voice* which was *more and more veiled, till it was hardly above a whisper*. She was *hurting herself with the jewels* that glittered on her tightly-clasped fingers pressed against her heart. (565, italics mine)

This is a passage that suggests moral anxiety and psychological guilt as well as eroticism. And later, "When Deronda turned round to approach her again, he saw her face bent toward him, her eyes dilated, her lips parted. . .Once more Gwendolen was pierced, as she had been by his face of sorrow at the Abbey. . ." (642). Again, when reading this passage with a woman's face bent towards a man's, eyes wide open, lips parted in anticipation and then "pierced", we can make the case for seeing a woman in the throes of ecstasy. Yet Gwendolen is not made an object of desire because she tells us at every turn that she has no sexual desires — we read her desire through the narrator, and in this way, Eliot

is able to show that Gwendolen does not have to surrender control. I would argue that Grandcourt's hold over Gwendolen is yet another way that Eliot points to the imprisonment of marriage, just as she does in *Middlemarch*, and is an issue separate from that of Gwendolen's sexuality. It is important for the characters not to surrender control of their sexuality because in Eliot's world a woman's sexuality is controlled by culture, society, and even the law, and she does not want this same fate for Gwendolen.

Here I draw on Catherine Belsey's argument when she says, "Female desire is under control of the law — it is cajoled into place by the promise of lifelong happiness, held there by the threat of social disgrace and the probability of penury" (127). This is exactly what Eliot proves with Gwendolen's character. Gwendolen functions by not desiring sexually, thus protecting herself from the vulnerability of either loving too much or not being loved in return. In fact, her downfall begins when she chooses to marry (in effect placing her desire under control of the law) and she is punished by achieving the "ladyhood" she was looking for. Ellen Rosenman says that "Gwendolen has no vocabulary to make a coherent story of her experience, for its implications are precisely what her society must repress: economic subtext of marriage, potential brutality sanctioned by the imbalance of power between men and women, and the role of women not as moral custodians but as valuable commodities on which families can trade" (250). So instead she gives us other occupations and ways of life in female characters out of the ordinary like Lydia Glasher and Deronda's mother,

Leonora Halm-Eberstein.

Lydia Glasher is Grandcourt's ex-mistress. She is the mother of his children, and is kept by him, though not married to him. Theirs is a relationship of sadistic control in which Lydia grovels at his feet, begging not to be forgotten. Even after Gwendolen and Grandcourt are married, Lydia continues to be his mistress and

> She was comparatively careless about the possibility of marriage. It was enough that she had escaped from a disagreeable husband and found a sort of bliss with a lover who had completely fascinated her. . .She was an impassioned, vivacious woman, fond of adoration, exasperated by five years of marital rudeness; and the sense of release was so strong upon her that it stilled anxiety far more than she actually enjoyed. (311-12)

This is not the traditional role for women in Eliot's time, and by placing a character in her novel who is different, and allowing that character to have other than patriarchally constructed desires (for instance for marriage), Eliot is giving us a voice — an "other" voice to listen to. The fact that Lydia's desire changes from one of a personal nature to that of a mother who wants the best for her children does not change the fact that she is still allowed to desire, and to reject, or not need, marriage.

Deronda's mother, Leonora Halm-Eberstein, is the other unconventional voice who is allowed freedom from patriarchal constraints. Leonora wants to "live a large life, with freedom to do what every one else did, and be carried along in a great current, not obliged to care" (582). She finds freedom by giving up Deronda and acting out her desire to be a great singer and actress; she was

"a great singer, and [she] acted as well as [she] sang. All the rest were poor beside [her]" (578). She says, "I did not want to marry. I was forced into marrying your father — forced, I mean by my father's wishes and commands; and besides, it was my best way of getting some freedom. I could rule my husband, but not my father. I had a right to be free. I had a right to seek my freedom from a bondage that I hated" (579). Through Leonora's character, Eliot gives us the knowledge of what it was truly like to be a woman in her society:

> You are not a woman. You may try—but you can never imagine what it is to have a man's force of genius in you, and yet to suffer the slavery of being a girl. To have a pattern cut out—"this is the Jewish woman'; this is what you must be; this is what you are wanted for; a woman's heart must be of such a size and no larger, else it must be pressed small, like Chinese feet; her happiness is to be made as cakes are, by a fixed receipt. (583)

By having Leonora speak, Eliot literally does give us a voice, one that speaks clearly to the reader of the repression and constraints women lived under.

So far Eliot has used several techniques to let us know what she wants us to know: she has given us female characters who fall outside of the norm, but who function expertly within the novel; she has given us monologues either through the narrator or the characters themselves that charge her society with the crime of repression and constraint towards women in society. Then she also gives us another possibility when she speaks through silence, literally. In chapter eleven, soon after Gwendolen and Grandcourt have met, there is an exchange of information in which Grandcourt is speaking, and he does not hear Gwendolen speak, but we do. Eliot writes Gwendolen's thoughts for the reader

to see as she has the narrator set the scene: ". . .conversation had begun, the first and constant element in it being that Grandcourt looked at Gwendolen persistently with a slightly exploring gaze, but without change of expression, while she only occasionally looked at him with a flash of observation a little softened by coquetry" (101). What follows is a conversation between the two where Grandcourt speaks, Gwendolen speaks, and then Eliot writes in "pause" and proceeds to give us Gwendolen's thoughts, all of which reflect on herself: "(Pause, wherein Gwendolen wondered whether Grandcourt would like what she said, but assured herself that she was not going to disguise her tastes)" (102). This wonderful "tête-à-tête," as the narrator tells us, gives us a huge insight into Gwendolen's thoughts upon meeting Grandcourt, and also sets up the desperation of her situation later which leads her to accept his proposal. By giving voice to Gwendolen's internal thoughts, Eliot gives her the power in this scenario, not Grandcourt, who is trying to control Gwendolen with his "exploring gaze."

Gwendolen wants to "go to the North Pole, or ride steeplechases, or go to be a queen in the East like Lady Hester Stanhope" (70), but she knows that "the life of an unmarried woman who could not go about and had no command of anything must necessarily be dull through all the degrees of comparison as time went on" (114). So she knows that her only hope is to find a husband who was "not likely to interfere with his wife's preferences" (113), and this is what she is thinking about when she accepts Grandcourt's proposal. She makes it clear that

"[if] she chose to take this husband, she would have him know that she was not going to renounce her freedom, or according to her favourite formula, 'not going to do as other women did'" (132). Grandcourt seems to fit her design: "He did not appear to enjoy anything much. That was not necessary: and the less he had of particular tastes or desires, the more freedom his wife was likely to have in following hers. Gwendolen conceived that after the marriage she would most probably be able to manage him thoroughly" (137). I believe that Gwendolen is afraid of what she feels for Deronda because she does not know what desire is; she has been trained from childhood to ignore her own feelings. Therefore, she can accept Grandcourt as a husband because she feels nothing for him and feels that this control will give her the upper hand in the marriage. She soon finds out how wrong she was, and is forced even before they are married to submit to Grandcourt's wishes. I believe that one way Eliot uses this disastrous marriage is to point out the deceit in the statement that "[m]arriage is the only true and satisfactory sphere of a woman" (143), made by Gwendolen's uncle. His statement supports the fact that Gwendolen submits to the convention of marriage because she has been trained to believe it from childhood, even though she yearns for something else as a young woman.

Eliot uses Gwendolen's hunger to point out woman's lot in her society:

> We women can't go in search of adventures—to find out the North-West Passage or the source of the Nile, or to hunt tigers in the East. We must stay where we are grown, or where the gardeners like to transplant us. We are brought up like the flowers, to look as pretty as we can, and be dull without complaining. That is my notion about the plants: they are often

> bored, and that is the reason why some of them have got poisonous. (135)

Clearly here we have the juxtaposition of what a woman desires, and what she can or cannot do in the reality of nineteenth-century society. Eliot also uses Gwendolen to speak of the difficulties in expressing desire within a universe which idealizes the chaste and the moral by using floral images which are used to convey a woman's sexuality.

Daniel Deronda, then, is an erotic novel that manages to be erotic without creating a woman who is an object of male desire. It also transports a female character out of the patriarchal world in which women are bought and sold into a world where we can imagine them in control of their own destiny. In numerous ways the narrator and the text work to undermine the possibility of Gwendolen's being a knowable "subject" for the reader. Instead, Eliot suggests that no one can be known and therefore placed into categories simply on the basis of gender or appearance. Indeed, with *Daniel Deronda*, Eliot gives us a novel about a man who finds his parentage; revels in its disclosures; who acts as a sort of priest-like figure listening to women's confessions; marries a woman whom he not only finds but grooms for marriage in his society; and "frees" Gwendolen from the guilt-ridden life she was bound for. And even more importantly Eliot's novel is about the limited choices of women in the Victorian age. It is about finding meaning in pauses, things that are not said explicitly; it is about finding power held by strong women in spite of the limitations of a patriarchal society. Most of all, it is about finding new meaning, overturning existing hierarchies in novels

from the Victorian realm of ideals, and giving voice to difference, and different ways of knowing. It is my opinion that if there were a sequel to *Daniel Deronda*, it would show Gwendolen living the kind of life she always wanted to lead; she would explore new worlds, and open up new possibilities and ways of thinking about women.

These four novels illustrate their authors' intent to characterize desire, and I was intrigued as I read each one by the contradiction that they presented to the historical facts I had learned about Victorian society. This same society that said respectable women did not experience desire or pleasure, and they certainly didn't write great fiction that would transcend time and place. Yet here I was reading this celebrated fiction by not one but two women more than one hundred years after it was written. These four novels by two different authors let me see a pattern emerge that helps to demonstrate this.

There are so many similarities in all four novels: a heroine on a journey searching for fulfillment, and I include sexual fulfillment in this exploration; a second female character who is in direct contrast to the Victorian ideal (Bertha Rochester, Ginevra Fanshawe, Mary Garth, and Leonora Halm-Eberstein); buildings and rooms that act as enclosures that trap the heroine (red-room, nunnery, the honeymoon suite, and a cathedral); and heroines who continually return to the green world/nature to free themselves from the trappings of Victorian society. Both novelists, indeed all four novels, work to create an illusion that becomes hard to resist. Were there other women who were able to

write about what was forbidden in the same way that these two women did? Possibly, but probably not as well.

Charlotte Brontë's novels work against the various attitudes of her society; she attempts to uncover the essential human sexual nature, allowing for the possibility of couples sharing and enjoying each other equally. Her triumphs are many as she discovered how to make romance, fairy tale or myth accommodate the consciousness of an internal self that existed despite external events. She must be credited with proving how important sexuality is in trying to understand human nature, before Freud even began his study of the unconscious. We owe a debt of gratitude to Charlotte Brontë for giving us female characters who explored and experienced sexual awakening, proving that women are capable of experiencing desire.

George Eliot advocated social change and her novels tell stories of societies in the midst of change. She felt that getting people to read about change was the first step toward exploring new possibilities and ways of thinking. She believed in the development of knowledge and felt that knowing would change society irrevocably. Only recently have feminist critics begun to see her novels as complex texts that weave together new ways of thinking about old ideals. A mastermind who intertwined details of objects, scenes, and characters to come up with an irrefutable reality, George Eliot is to be credited for visualizing what most Victorians refused to accept or believe, that is, the fact that women want to be more than just wives, mothers, and governesses.

Do we know any more about Victorian women now than we did at the beginning of this project? Again, yes and no. Yes, because we see women who found a way to write with truth and conviction about a society that embraced falsehood and repression. No, because there is always an element of mystery shrouding the age that we call Victorian that says we can never know for sure what motivates how or why people behaved as they did in the past. Over one hundred years after the fact we are using thoughts and beliefs to examine a past that never would have allowed what we see and do today. We must continue to speak out about the injustices inflicted upon women in our history and we must never be forced to retreat back into the silence of the Victorian age.

While we continue to look for the bits and pieces of the nineteenth-century that will give us a clearer picture of this fascinating society, there seems to be no lack of information about their bizarre yet curious attitude toward sexuality. Repressed sexuality, hypocritical idealism and psychological distortion were mainstays of their society giving rise to a definition that invariably includes the sexually ignorant or repressed. A history of sexuality and all its components has been created by the likes of Havelock Ellis, Masters and Johnson, and Kinsey which gives us much more information than we would probably like to have. However, it is desire that remains as elusive as always, despite the glimpses we are given through the written word into its very nature and definition.

Do we know any more about desire now than we did at the beginning of

this project? Yes and no. Yes because two extraordinary women found ways to tell their readers about desire, this need, this hunger that everyone owns yet exhibits in very unique and individual ways. We have examined desire's definition, its application, and the expectation of its fulfillment through the eyes of psychoanalysis, and theory. Yet we still cannot know everything about desire because it is unknown, undefinable, and mysterious. I believe this is because we are always wanting something; even after we have what we wanted, we continue to want more of the same. In some cases this need turns into an addiction, something that we crave continually — why? — because desire can never be fulfilled.

Dennis Foster suggests in *Sublime Enjoyment*: "The ecstasy the body can produce provides a motive that the rational mind has no access to" (65). To me this explains why even if we manage to give up one addiction, another will usually take its place – i.e., if we quit smoking we eat more to make up for it; if we give up drinking we take up running and have to run every day to fill that need. When it comes to desire in relationships, many times (not always) we experience that hunger only if the other is unavailable to us; once the relationship holds the promise of availability, our desire wanes and we move on to the next unavailable person. We want to continue feeling that ecstasy produced by the body.

I believe that writers have a unique desire in that they want their readers to experience the desire of reading, of actually turning page after page, finding a

resolution at the end of some sort. Therein lies the paradox of desire – we want the author to provide us with something to desire – we long for a conclusion that allows us to say "yes, that's it, I am satisfied", but we never are. We keep waiting for the next book, reading the next installment, anything that will allow us to continue desiring. So desire will continue to lie just beyond our grasp, not just because of the way it has been defined, but because we wouldn't have it any other way. If desire were to suddenly become something that was associated with fulfillment, it would lose its appeal, leaving us almost without hopes and wishes and dreams.

New possibilities and ways of thinking about women continue to be a struggle today even in the new millennium. We are still fighting for the right to control our bodies, the glass ceiling has been raised but continues in many areas, and we still fight stereotypes that say we should separate motherhood and careers. That being said, we have also made many great strides – in research dealing with women's health and women's history. If we are to continue making such strides we must keep researching, and learning about the women in our past who shaped the future for us. Researching literature and analyzing texts help us make connections with the women who challenged the status quo and fought for the rights we take for granted today. Reading gives flight to the imagination and yet fulfills a basic human need for understanding who we are.

Today there is a proliferation of women authors, all of whom owe a debt of

gratitude to the likes of Jane Austen, Charlotte Brontë, George Eliot, and Virginia Woolf. For it is their courage to write about truth, even the kind of truth that hurts, that enabled women after them to find a room of their own so that they could continue writing, to continue speaking out not only about the lies and misrepresentations of women in our history but to offer changes society would need to make so that the same injustices did not continue into the future. I write today because of them, and because of what I understood in their novels; I am free to experience desire and feel pleasure because they wrote works that intrigued and inspired me. I like to imagine that as a Victorian woman finished reading *Jane Eyre* she put the book down, put a hand to her cheek (which still held the hint of a blush), said "oh my" and was forever changed by the emotions she continued to feel. Yes Dr. Acton, women do desire.

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